GEOGRAPHY@UNIVERSITY

GEOGRAPHY@UNIVERSITY

MAKING THE MOST OF YOUR GEOGRAPHY DEGREE AND COURSES

Gordon Clark and Terry Wareham
Lancaster University

CONTENTS

Acknowledgements

Preface

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The authors gratefully acknowledge:

- the advice and comments on this Guide from geography colleagues and members of the Advisory and Graduate Panels of the Geography Discipline Network (GDN), and from undergraduates in the Department of Geography at Lancaster University;

- the cartoons in Sections 4.2, 4.3, 5.4 and 5.8 drawn by Dr Peter Vujakovic (Christchurch College, Canterbury, Kent) and reproduced by kind permission of the artist and the editors and publisher (Carfax) of the *Journal of Geography in Higher Education* in which they first appeared;

- the cartoon in Section 4.10 drawn by, and reproduced by kind permission of Dr Mike Jeffries (University of Northumbria);

- the cartoons in Sections 4.1 and 4.4 devised by Dr Gordon Clark and drawn by Christopher Beacock (Lancaster University);

- the quotations from geographers supplied by Dr Lorraine Craig (Royal Geographical Society with the Institute of British Geographers, London);

- the assistance of Dr Iain Hay (Flinders University, Adelaide, Australia) and Professor Richard Le Heron (University of Auckland, New Zealand) for the details of the careers of geography graduates in Australia and New Zealand respectively.

PREFACE

We think it will be worth your while reading this Guide because it:

- tells you how geography degrees work, so you will know what to expect;
- gives you advice on how to make the most of your geography teaching and how to learn geography successfully;
- will help you do better in examinations, essays and the other ways in which your geography courses will be assessed;
- focuses on how geography will give you new skills and help you develop as a person, colleague and citizen;
- will prepare you for a career and learning long after university.

We hope you find this a useful Guide.

Gordon Clark and Terry Wareham

1

INTRODUCTION

Geography is the subject which holds the key to our future.
Michael Palin, broadcaster and author.

1.1 What this Guide is trying to do

This Guide has been designed to help you study geography at university (or polytechnic or college). Whether you have already started or are about to start a geography degree, the Guide aims to let you make the most of your time in higher education. Whether geography (or a part of it such as human or physical geography) is the whole of your degree or a substantial part of it, this Guide shows you how to get more out of your degree. We hope you will enjoy your degree more and become a better geographer and more employable. The information and advice here should be as relevant to part-time students as to full-time ones; and to those taking a full geography degree as to those following only a few geography courses or modules within a different degree scheme. So how is the Guide going to help you?

First, we want to explain what higher education, focused on geography, is trying to do and how it will help you develop into a resourceful, versatile and self-confident person (we discuss this further in Section 2).

Second, the Guide tells you what qualities employers are looking for in their prospective staff, so you will know what to aim for during your three or four years at university (see Section 3 for details). The study of geography is unlikely to take up all of your time at university, nor should it. So in Section 6 the Guide suggests several ways in which you can take the initiative and use your spare time to enrich your period at university (and the rest of your life) and improve further your chances of getting the good job you want. Geography, we believe, can really let you get more out of life overall as well as being useful in career terms.

Third, the Guide de-mystifies the various elements of your degree and of the geography courses/modules which make up your degree. It explains why staff use devices like lectures and tutorials, examinations and essays; what they are using them for; and what you can do to get the most out of them. This is what we explore in Sections 4 and 5. We believe that it will help you if educators tell you why they are

teaching what they do, why they teach it that way and what they expect you to get from it.

Finally, the Guide provides you with a framework to help you measure your personal progress towards your goals. At various points during this Guide we shall talk about the value of assessing your progress and reflecting on how you are getting on. There is a grid in Appendix A which gives you a structure for this. In Appendix B is a log where, under various headings, you can add to your personal record of achievements as your degree develops, year by year.

This Guide is necessarily short, which is no bad thing since you can read it all quickly. It is *not* a complete geography degree course in one slim volume. It is an overview - something that is often missing - which shows you how all the components of a geography degree fit together. It suggests some steps you can take to make the most of your time at university studying geography.

1.2 The Guide's limits

So, this Guide has been designed to operate within certain limits:

- it does not teach you geography as such; it is about how to study geography which is what the geography textbooks don't tell you;
- it deals mostly with how to study geography rather than with how to study in general although many of the issues here are applicable to other subjects;
- it does not cover the 'lifestyle' issues of being a student (e.g. your social life, diet or sport);
- it provides general guidance on geography degrees and geography courses/modules, and obviously cannot deal with the unique features of every geography department.

1.3 Making this *your* guide

You are not 'just another student'. You are you; different from other students in terms of your current skills, your interests in life and personal values. These differences will affect how you interact with your geography degree. So we have written this Guide in a way that lets you 'customise' it. There are sections throughout the Guide where we invite you to pause and think about yourself, your academic progress and your personal development. Here is your first chance to do this.

ACTIVITY 1

Try and get clear what your starting point is. You might like to jot down here your thoughts on five points.

1) Why did you come to university?

2) What do you hope to get out of your university degree?

3) Why did you choose a geography degree rather than another subject?

4) What would you like to be doing five years after graduating?

5) As well as earning some money, is there anything else you would like to be doing or contributing to society, family or friends in five years' time?

1.4 How to use the Guide

To get the most out of this Guide we suggest that you use it in two ways. First, it would be useful for you to *read through the whole Guide* fairly soon, so as to get an overview of the way we see geography degrees working. A geography degree has many elements which combine to form an integrated 'package' of higher education. This Guide shows you how the various elements of the degree combine and why staff use them. Second, you can use the Guide as *a reference work*, to be taken off your shelf whenever you need ideas on a specific topic (e.g. how to improve your essays).

If you are *just starting at university* or are reading this Guide before you go to university, then we would recommend that you focus particularly on Sections 2 and 3, 4.1, 4.2, 4.4, 4.10, 5.1-5.4, and Section 6. Some other sections could safely be left for later - for example, Sections 4.3, 4.6 and 5.6 since you are unlikely to be doing a dissertation or major project until much later in your degree course.

If you *have already progressed* some way through your degree, then you could skim quickly through Sections 1, 3.1 and 3.2, whereas it is more important to read Sections 3.3, 3.4, 4.7, 5.6, 5.10, 6.5 and 6.6.

For everyone Section 7 is a very quick summary of the whole Guide.

Please remember that although we can give advice and guidance, there are no sure-fire routes to success. You need to read the advice and then adopt those aspects which suit you and your temperament. If a technique of study is working well for you, then carry on using it. However, if you are dissatisfied with your results, you can look through this Guide for alternative ways of learning which might give you better marks.

ACTIVITY 2
You may be assigned to a tutor or a member of staff early in your first year at university. That person's job will be to help you with university study in general and with the particular task of learning geography. A tutor is a useful person to get to know soon, and they will want to get to know you. So make sure you accept their invitation to meet and keep in touch. They could turn out to be really helpful.

1.5 Further Reading

At the end of the Guide Section 8 (Further Reading) is designed to expand on what has been included here. You will find references to books and other materials on, for example, how to prepare a dissertation, how to produce a *curriculum vitae* or *résumé* and how to write essays. The books in this section are all easily available in university libraries and some will also be found in major bookshops. One particularly useful one is Pauline Kneale's *Study skills for geography students: a practical guide* (London, Arnold, 1999).

In some ways learning geography is not all that different from learning many other subjects and so you might also want to look at some of the general 'study guides' which you can buy and which are listed in full and alphabetically in Section 9 (References) at the end of the Guide. Those by Barnes (1995), Marshall (1995), Northedge (1995), Becker (1986) and Rowntree (1998) are very useful. Tolmie (1998) provides a tantalising group of commentaries from students in a number of disciplines who got the very best degree results (first-class honours degrees); unfortunately, most of them could not fully explain why they were quite so successful at university!

So, what is geography?

Geography is about places:
- *what they are like now, were like in the past and why they changed;*
- *how the people and natural aspects of places affect each other;*
- *how and why economies, societies and cultures, and physical systems work in distinctive ways in different places;*
- *how local, regional, national and global systems interact.*

By the end of his/her degree a geography student will:
- *be fascinated by the diversity of places and understand how they work;*
- *appreciate as a citizen different traditions and environments;*

- *understand as a scientist a wide range of contemporary issues;*
- *appreciate the complexity of human and physical systems;*
- *be familiar with the social-science and natural-science approaches to studying the world;*
- *be critical of orthodox thinking and what we take for granted;*
- *be able to describe, analyse, research and understand places using different traditions of study;*
- *be able to communicate that understanding in different ways;*
- *have been prepared intellectually and in terms of abilities to study, understand and communicate a wide range of complex issues long after leaving university.*

.....which is pretty impressive!

1.6 Where next?

Of course, one of the most important points has little to do with geography specifically. You need to think about why you are at university at all, and the ways in which higher education changes people. That is what we shall consider in Section 2.

2

WHAT GEOGRAPHY IN HIGHER EDUCATION IS ABOUT

There are some ideas so wrong that only a very intelligent person could believe them.
George Orwell (attributed to)

If you were to ask us "why should I go to university and study for a degree in geography?" there would be five answers we could give; that is, five benefits you should gain from higher education. They are:

- learning about yourself and others;
- learning to learn;
- learning to apply knowledge, skills and the ability-to-learn to new topics;
- learning to be independent;
- learning geography.

In this chapter we shall describe these five benefits from higher education.

2.1 Learning about yourself and others

I have never let my schooling interfere with my education.
Mark Twain

Whatever subject you study, the most important thing you should gain from going to university is a deeper appreciation of yourself. You will find out what your strengths are, where you want your life to go, and what personal and political values you are going to take into later life. You will gain this deeper knowledge of yourself not only because you will have had the space to get to know yourself better, but also because you will have developed as a person. Perhaps you are living away from home for the first time; meeting many new people; exposed to new subjects and ways of looking at the world; your established ideas will be challenged; you will have many opportunities to develop new interests. All in all, life at university, whether you are 18 or much older, will be an experience that is likely to change you. If you are a mature student, you may already have a clear idea about how you hope university will change you.

Of course, you can only make a successful choice of career if you really know yourself. Think about the following careers - teacher, accountant, research scientist,

national park ranger, public-relations consultant, project manager, European civil servant. Each of these jobs will appeal enormously to some students and be the last thing on Earth that others would want to do. Many people have strong views on the kind of job they want - living in London or New York, in a town near home or overseas; individualist or team member; working for a commercial organisation or as part of a caring profession. To choose your career you really do need to know yourself and studying at university will help you do that.

Arguably, geography will help you get to know yourself better than many other subjects because of the wide range of contemporary issues you will study in geography (human, physical and environmental). There is also a diversity of approaches to the subject (theoretical and applied; natural science and social science) and many teaching methods are used in geography (see Section 4 for details). Geography offers you more opportunities than most subjects to work in different ways on different subjects, and that should help you learn more about yourself and your values. The more you know about yourself, the more self-confident you are likely to be in your abilities to learn and cope.

ACTIVITY 3

What would you say is your greatest strength as a student new to university?

How might you make best use of this strength?

If you suspect that you might have a weakness as a student which might hold you back at university, what is it and how might you minimise or work round it?

You will also get to know other people - staff such as lecturers, professors and tutors; other geography students in classes, tutorials and group projects; and students studying other subjects during your social life at university. This is important; understanding and getting on with all sorts of people is vital for later life.

2.2 Learning to learn

Education is what is left when you have forgotten all you have ever learned.
Anon.

You may think that you do not need to learn-how-to-learn because you already know - after all, you did well enough at school to get to university and you may have held down jobs after leaving school. To an extent you are right; you have already shown

that you can learn things. However, at university you are going to be faced with a tougher task than at school or in the workplace. There will be more material to master, higher expectations of you and more emphasis on you as an independent learner. *Under these pressures you may have to re-think how you learn.*

You will have to find more of your own material to learn from; you will have to think more for yourself; and you will have to work out for yourself how to improve your performance. The ways of studying that saw you successfully through school or employment may not be sufficient for the harder job of learning at university. But think of the eventual prize - not only the ability to master Geography to degree level, but also a set of learning skills that you can use on any task, however complex or obscure, during the rest of your life. So, learning-how-to-learn at the highest level will be one of the main benefits of a university education. This guide aims to help you re-think how to learn Geography.

So, if 'learning to learn' is a big part of doing a geography degree, how do you learn to learn? Clearly there is no one way in which all students will learn most effectively. We all have our own ways of working. If the way you organise your work is succeeding for you, then keep it going. However, if your results are disappointing, then might like to consider other ways of working, such as the advice in this Guide. When you get an essay back, review the mark and comments, noting what the lecturer liked - worth repeating that? - and what was not appreciated so much. Try to focus on the weaker areas and see how they could be improved. That way you consolidate your strengths and work to improve your weaker areas.

The tricky part is that your various lecturers may react differently to your work. Some might put more emphasis on you showing that you know the relevant factual material whereas others will be more impressed by your showing evidence of wide reading beyond the lecture notes. Some may be sticklers for correct spelling and grammar. For example, some staff will not tolerate the use of the word "I" in essays - they say that essays should be written in an impersonal manner - "it may be argued that..." and not "I believe that...". Other staff will accept "I". To a limited extent - let's not exaggerate the variations among staff - you need to try and work out what individual staff like and expect from the students taking their courses, and then write accordingly. A good clue as to what staff place emphasis on is often found in their lecturing style.

Of course, you don't have to learn geography alone. There is often a lot of merit in getting together with a few other students to work in a team, helping each other to understand your courses. When there are crises, you can support each other.

Traditionally most undergraduates in geography have been full-time students; that is, they can be at university everyday throughout the academic session. But what if you are not a full-time student because you have family members to look after or you need to support yourself through university with paid employment? How then do you cope with fixed timetables, field courses and library systems designed originally for the full-time student?

Part of the solution may come from Web-based courses and study packs which can be

pursued at your own pace and at times which fit in with your other commitments. You may be able to get a fellow student to photocopy their lecture notes for you or to tape record the lectures. Your university library may make special arrangements for part-time students to borrow books for longer periods, but if they do not, you may need to reserve books ahead of time so that they will be available when you visit the library.

Field courses can be a problem - even one-day excursions let alone longer residential courses. Time off work and family care arrangements may be difficult and expensive to arrange. Your department should be open to the idea that you can develop your fieldwork skills in other ways from your base at home and at your own pace. It would certainly be worth enquiring about this.

Some students with special needs (for example, those with restricted mobility) may find that the physical demands of some types of fieldwork are rather too taxing or unsafe. Again the best advice is to talk through the proposed fieldwork, dissertation or practical work with the staff so that problems can be foreseen and worked around. The same advice applies to lectures and tutorials if you have impaired sight or hearing, for example. Staff can easily help you once they know your needs.

2.3 Learning how to apply knowledge, skills and the ability-to-learn to new topics

The reasonable man adapts himself to the world: the unreasonable one persists in trying to adapt the world to himself. Therefore all progress depends on the unreasonable man.
George Bernard Shaw

Learning geography is also about learning how to apply knowledge and skills to new situations. By the time you get to the end of your degree you will be able to show that, faced with subjects almost unknown to you when you entered university, you were able to master them to degree level. Having seen that you have done this once for your geography degree, employers will be confident that you can learn other new things in whatever jobs they decide to give you - in short, that you are adaptable.

This ability to apply knowledge and skills is increasingly important. If you stay in one job for a long time, you will find that the job will evolve; even to stay still you will have to learn new skills. Increasingly (as we shall explain in Section 3) you may find yourself moving (or being moved) between jobs. Again, it will be critical for you to have the ability to learn new skills and new bodies of knowledge and to be able to apply to new jobs the knowledge and insights you gained from your degree and previous jobs. Mature students have some advantage here over school-leavers since they will already have experienced in their former jobs the need to learn new skills and adapt their existing skills to new situations.

2.4 Learning to be independent

It is impossible to enjoy idling thoroughly unless one has plenty of work to do
Jerome K Jerome

Part of the experience of university is learning to be independent. What does that mean? It means:

- operating at a high level using your own intellectual resources in areas which are complex and not routine;
- being self-confident enough in your abilities and judgment to be effective and bold when working independently or with others, even on large projects;
- having the ability to weigh up evidence and situations;
- being critical of arguments and evidence;
- reaching fair judgments which you can justify;
- being able to monitor and improve your own performance.

Your geography degree will equip you in all these areas. You will benefit from having these skills and qualities not only for whatever jobs you go into but also as a citizen - you will get so much more out of life.

2.5 Learning geography

Geography is a very rewarding subject. It covers a wide range of topics, giving you an insight into the environment, economy and society and how these three interact. It ranges across the continents, encompassing global issues and local events, and showing how they are connected. Geography studies why places are distinctive and how they have changed over time. All in all, geography is a superb university subject with plenty of scope for you to specialise later in your degree in specific areas which capture your imagination.

Only by trying to learn a specific university-level subject - in this case, geography - can you acquire the deeper intellectual qualities and secure your personal development as we described earlier in this Section. Additionally, we would argue that geography is a better subject for you to study than many others because of its very wide range of teaching methods (which we shall describe in Section 4) and methods of assessment (see Section 5).

You might want to get a general overview of geography as a whole before you plunge into the detail of specific courses. Try dipping into some of the books which show you the full range of geographers' interests and point out the important real-world issues geographers have become involved in. These authors have also tried to demonstrate how geographers approach issues and think about them. Among the best such books are those by John Allen and Doreen Massey (1995), Peter Haggett (1990), Doreen Massey and John Allen (1984) and Alan Rogers, Heather Viles and Andrew Goudie (1992). The full references to these books are given in Section 9 (References) at the end of the Guide.

Learning geography is an excellent vehicle for you to achieve the transformation that

higher education will create in you as a worker, thinker and citizen. But remember that there are many ways in which you can learn geography. You can learn:

- from your teachers (that is, from your lectures, tutorials and informal discussions);
- from and with fellow students;
- for yourself (reading books and articles, planning essays, revising for examinations);
- from your assessed work (preparing an essay, and reflecting on the marks and the feedback comments on your work);
- from reflection (thinking back on your geography; making links between modules and other subjects in your degree scheme; and considering the geographical importance of current affairs).

These are all equally important and useful ways in which to learn geography. Learning geography is not confined to formally timetabled periods of your life such as lecture slots and field visits. Geography is all around you all the time, as you travel around town and from city to city.

ACTIVITY 4

Many people find that they can improve their understanding of geography by discussing a concept or issue with a fellow student. Working with a group of friends can generate new ideas and it complements working on your own. Studying does not have to be a lonely friendless experience and it is probably more effective and fun if it is not.

2.6 Assessing your progress

What do you want to get out of your geography degree and how can you be sure whether you are achieving your goals? It is useful to try and work out the position you hope to have reached at the end of your geography degree. Then you can check how much progress towards that ideal state you have made so far and you can plan how to achieve your final position by the time you graduate.

The self-assessment sheet in Appendix A suggests a list of things you might have achieved so far. Turn to Appendix A now and try filling it in. Put a tick against those things or experiences which you have occasionally done or had, and put two ticks against those you are already pretty good at. There will probably not be many ticks if you are a school-leaver and you are doing this self-assessment right at the start of your university degree, but each year you should be able to add some more. It is worth repeating this exercise each year. By the time you leave university with your geography degree, most items will have been covered. *This is the path along which your university is planning to take you.*

Another useful activity to look at now is Appendix B - your Personal Record. Since a lot is going to happen to you during your time at university, it will help to get into the habit of recording *briefly* your achievements and progress at least twice a year. This will be very useful as a source of information which you can use to construct your

curriculum vitae or *résumé* which you will need when applying for jobs in later years. You might think that, at the start of your university degree, your personal record would be rather empty. Not so. At school you will have acquired some skills in writing essays and you may have some experience of using computers. Your family and social lives and school work will have given you some track record in working with other people to achieve a common goal. Of course, if you are coming to university rather later in life than the average school-leaver, you will have a head-start in personal skills from your former working life. So we suggest that you start jotting down your achievements so far. If you compiled a Record of Achievement, Progress File or something similar at school, don't let that lapse; the basic idea behind such a personal record is still sound.

However, to appreciate fully the approach this Guide takes to learning geography, you need to be aware of the major changes which are occurring in the economy and in the kinds of graduates that employers are looking for. The next section describes and explains what is happening and how it will affect you after you have graduated.

3

GEOGRAPHY, GEOGRAPHERS AND YOUR FUTURE CAREER

In this Section we shall:

- discuss the traditional and more modern views on the links between university degree courses and graduates' careers;
- show why firms and governments both want more skilled graduates;
- describe the qualities employers are looking for in their future employees;
- demonstrate the particular usefulness of a geography degree today.

3.1 Why study a subject?

One of the ideas behind this Guide is that you can use your time at university to make yourself more employable by gaining skills and experiences which will be recognised by potential employers as likely to make you a more effective worker. If we were writing a guide for those studying English, history, politics or many other subjects, the idea of university as a preparation for the world of work would be promoted just as strongly these days.

However, as late as the 1970s, this notion that a degree subject should be mainly vocational would have seemed an odd one among students and would have been unacceptable to academics. For students, university was about studying a subject because one was interested in it, and also having a really good time during the last stage of growing up into adulthood. For academics, the purpose of studying their subject was intrinsic and 'liberal'; you studied a subject for its own sake. If the subject turned out to be useful in later life, that was a bonus - it was not the university's purpose to train you for employment. University was about a general intellectual maturing, about transmitting liberal cultural values to a new generation, and about creating a group of critical, highly trained leaders for the future. That is all still true - geography is inherently interesting and you will benefit as a citizen from having studied it at university. But that is no longer the whole story.

3.2 Recent changes

So much has changed. In the early 1970s about 12 per cent of school-leavers in the UK went on to higher education and older students were rare. Today the figure in the UK and New Zealand is between 34 and 40 per cent of school-leavers and in the USA over 50 per cent. Additionally, mature students are much more common than previously. This trend from higher education for an elite to a mass system of

education is not unique to these countries. It is found to a greater or lesser extent throughout the developed world and represents a sharp acceleration in the steady upward trend since the 1930s.

There are no longer enough jobs among the country's leaders and the traditional professions to absorb all these graduates. Graduates are now taking formerly non-graduate jobs. That might sound retrograde; it is not, because of other developments in the economy. Many public and private organisations are 'de-layering'. Having shed their production-line staff through automation, they are now thinning out the many traditional layers of management and bureaucracy. The resulting 'flatter' organisations - some with only five grades of staff between the most junior employee and the managing director - now need their quite junior staff (perhaps only recently recruited) to have some of the resourcefulness, intelligence and originality of thought which once were the hallmarks of a few high-flyers. High-level skills, such as the ability to shoulder responsibility and to solve problems, are now needed throughout most organisations. There is a real graduate's job to be done in traditionally non-graduate posts.

A further dimension is the role of government. Across the world, governments are looking at how they can boost the international competitiveness of their firms. The idea of using the national education system to make the country's firms more effective - because they have better trained staff - is obviously an appealing one. Why, it might be argued, should the taxpayer finance people to spend three or four years at university studying a subject of no use whatsoever? Why should the government not see their investment in higher education as an enormous training programme for future workers? This utilitarian notion of what universities are for fits neatly with the concern among firms (described earlier) to recruit new staff ready to shoulder considerable responsibility soon after appointment, rather than after twenty years of unblemished service. Of course, if you are paying your own university fees, a degree course which promises to be vocationally useful may be a particularly attractive idea.

3.3 Your role and what employers want

So, where do you fit into this picture? Are you just a high-grade operative helping your country's international competitiveness and bolstering the profits of 'slim and trim' firms? Partly, yes, but there is a lot in these changes for you. You may get more interesting and responsible jobs much earlier in your career. You may wish to move between jobs more frequently to get a higher salary, or you might be moved by your employer as they restructure the firm, closing down some operations and starting up others. Careers may be about to become more fluid, with people having to, or wanting to, change job more often. You may need to re-train mid-career rather than the traditional idea of a life of employment with a single employer after graduation at the age of 21.

This may actually be what will happen though the statistical evidence is not yet clear. It is undoubtedly true that governments and employers have been pressurising universities to alter their courses away from the purely subject-centred (you go to university to be taught astrophysics or Anglo-Saxon) to being more skills-centred.

Initially, this took the form of a major concentration on 'skills training' of a fairly low-level character such as the ability to handle numbers, to write fluently, to give public presentations and to manage one's time. These were the immediate deficiencies which employers claimed to find in their newly graduated recruits, and the universities' job was to put this right. A similar set of goals existed within the school system.

Gradually there has developed a more considered view of the qualities that employers and employees think will be needed in the future. The aim now is for a more complex set of abilities and experiences among graduates. You will now need:

- to be able to solve problems;
- to apply ideas and skills to new areas;
- to be able to work with others (to argue, negotiate, co-operate, compromise and win);
- to be self-reliant;
- to be able and willing to learn throughout your working life;
- to be able to master a wide range of complex topics;
- to be able to cope with uncertainty and change;
- to be self-confident;
- to be self-reflective (able to improve yourself without teacher/boss always having to be present to correct you).

Perhaps now you can appreciate why, at the start of Section 2, we said that among the benefits of higher education were:

- learning about yourself and others;
- learning to learn;
- learning to apply knowledge, skills and the ability-to-learn to new topics;
- learning to be independent.

It is these higher level and less easily definable qualities which will be the most important for your personal career progress and for your employers.

If you think about this new vocational agenda for higher education from the viewpoint of the universities, you can quickly appreciate their problem. It is easy enough to see how you can build, say, statistics training or fieldwork into the degree scheme so that geography graduates will be numerate and practical (particularly when class sizes are small). But how do you make large intakes of students self-confident or self-reliant or good problem-solvers? These qualities and experiences take a great deal more ingenuity on the universities' part to incorporate into degree schemes. The universities' problem is made all the more acute by the fact that staff:student ratios are rising - there are fewer staff employed to teach more students - and staff are under increasing pressure to spend more time doing research or generating income. The result is that more emphasis is being placed on you as an alert learner actively quarrying your geography degree course for all that it can give you.

ACTIVITY 5

Buy or borrow a copy of one of the 'good' newspapers - one with job advertisements for graduates. Look through the jobs pages and draw up a list of the jobs which mention the skills you can expect to develop as a geographer. What sort of jobs are these?

3.4 Geographers' careers

Employers rarely need narrow specialists. They need bright, committed, inquisitive and determined individuals with the ability to draw on what is happening elsewhere in the world. The best geographers are stars in this respect!
Professor David Rhind, Chief Executive (1991-98), Ordnance Survey (the UK's national mapping agency).

Being a specialist is one thing, getting a job is another.
Stephen Leacock

Why do geographers have one of the higher rates of graduate employment? What do we know about the careers which geography graduates have actually followed in the recent past? Their experiences have varied over time (for example, recruitment into the financial services sector has waxed and waned) and they have differed from country to country, but some general points are clear.

Careers start soon after graduation but they then evolve: sometimes students switch jobs after a few years, perhaps following completion of a postgraduate degree or a re-appraisal of one's longer-term goals. In 1998 the Royal Geographical Society (with the Institute of British Geographers) surveyed the careers of a sample of British geographers five years after they had first graduated (see their WWW site at http://www.rgs.org/ed/). The six major career areas for geographers were:
- administration and management;
- teaching and lecturing;
- financial sector;
- marketing;
- research;
- industry and manufacturing.

Careers in Geography (see the Association of American Geographers' WWW site at http://www.aag.org/careers/) asks the sensible question "what can you do as a geographer?" In reply they list 133 careers which American geographers have gone into. The *GeoJobs* publications in New Zealand and Australia all give examples of how individual geographers have worked through the early years of a very wide range of careers.

In short, geographers can take all kinds of jobs in the public and private sectors, which cushions them against the vagaries of recruitment in individual areas. The

other valuable feature of geographers is that they can be both specialists and generalists. Many will specialise during their final year in technical areas of the subject and use those skills in their careers - examples include medical geography, hydrology, conservation, GIS and computing skills, or land management. Additionally geography graduates are generalists - good communicators in writing and orally, numerate and computer literate - with a wide understanding of how the world works and how people influence the physical environment. We can play to both strengths as needed - high technical skills in specific areas and/or flexibility in what we can tackle.

That is why geography graduates have one of the highest rates of graduate employment.

A number of observers have agreed that geography as a subject has very useful features as a preparation for life in general as much as for a career. Here is what some commentators and employers have said - and the authors are very grateful to the Royal Geographical Society (with the Institute of British Geographers) for gathering these people's views.

Geography provides a liberal education that transcends traditional disciplinary boundaries in bringing together social and natural sciences - people and their environment. It deals with issues that are central for society and it equips the young for their future.
Professor Andrew Goudie, Pro-Vice-Chancellor, University of Oxford.

Numeracy, literacy and geographicity are the things that people in underdeveloped countries need to help them with their decisions.
Baroness Chalker of Wallesey (Linda Chalker), UK Minister of State for Overseas Development, 1989-96.

The understanding of geography is central to industry for the efficient delivery of goods and services, and the commercial sector has an increasing need to employ people who understand the interaction between people, environment and society.
Vanessa Lawrence, GIS Business Development Manager, Autodesk Ltd.

The geographers we have recruited are well-organised, are able to structure their thoughts and actions most efficiently, and have very clear views of their career paths.
Pene Axtell, Recruitment and Training Manager, Carnaud Metalbox plc.

We also asked our own recent graduates from Lancaster University what they particularly valued from their geography degrees. Here is what a cross-section of them said.

I really benefited from the applied skills I learned.

The research skills I got were very useful for my job in marketing.

The friendly treatment I got from the staff - very accessible - suited me perfectly.

The field trips and the brief time we had getting to know professionals/officials in the 'real world' were memorable and beneficial.

I am a property consultant and so analytical skills, data analysis and report writing were the things I got from the degree that have been invaluable for my job.

It increased my confidence to do things.

I went on to an MPhil in Social Sciences and then into consultancy in social and market research, so the key elements were the range of courses, survey methods and the dissertation - that's what I now do daily.

Research strategy and time management and interpersonal skills based around the projects.

The variety of the course has helped me to talk to people better [she is now in business banking].

As a TV news researcher, I needed the all-round education and the broad-based degree.

Report-writing to deadlines [he works as a district manager for a brewery].

In my accident investigation work, the transport geography module was perfect for this job.

Perhaps the key point here is how you will come to value many different parts of your geography degree, and often not the obviously 'geographical' bits. You may be unable to predict while at university which will turn out to be the crucial aspects for you in later life.

In Sections 4 and 5 we shall show you how departments of geography are trying to achieve their educational goals and so prepare you for the types of working life you are likely to have in the first half of the 21st century. But for the moment you might like to undertake the following simple exercise.

ACTIVITY 6

Visit your school or university's careers office. Check what employers in your ideal job area are looking for when they advertise jobs. What sort of jobs are they advertising? How do you shape up for the skills they are asking for? Does the careers office run any courses on how to apply for jobs or how to do well at job interviews?

4

UNDERSTANDING THE LEARNING AND TEACHING OF GEOGRAPHY

Among the hundreds of departments of geography around the world there is a wide range of courses and degree structures. However, some features are regularly found. Early in your degree you will probably follow a set of courses/modules common to all the students on your degree scheme. Later in your degree you will probably have some choice as to which courses you study. Most of the courses will be taught using a relatively small number of teaching methods. How geography courses are taught varies much less than the actual subject matter of the courses. So, you will usually be taught geography through:

- lectures
- tutorials
- seminars
- fieldwork
- practical classes and
- a dissertation or project.
- Additionally you will be able to learn geography through the Internet and using other resources.

Each is a distinctive way of introducing you to geography. Your role in the learning process varies from the apparently fairly passive (taking notes during a lecture) to the obviously highly active (as during your dissertation and fieldwork). This chapter explains how each of these methods of teaching and learning works and what you can do to get the most from them.

4.1 Lectures

He who can, does; he who cannot, teaches; [he who cannot teach, lectures?].
George Bernard Shaw

Traditional advice to new staff on how to write a lecture.

First, you tell them what you are going to tell them (set the scene). Second, you tell them. Third, you tell them what you have just told them (recap and summarise).

What I tell you three times is true.
Lewis Carroll

The lecture is probably the single most frequently used method of teaching geography (and most other subjects). A lecture involves a timetabled period of usually one hour at a regular time each week during which a member of staff will talk about some aspect of geography. The lecture topics will usually be listed in the syllabus section of the course's handout. With so much stress placed on lectures as a method of teaching, it is worthwhile reviewing why they still form the mainstay of teaching geography in higher education.

What are lectures for? Lecturers are trying to do one or more of the following things:

- start you off (and no more than that) on your study of an aspect of geography;
- give you key facts you need to know (e.g. dates, places, events, theories, formulae, data);
- give you an overview of the structure of a large field of research and writing by geographers, focusing on the essentials;
- show you how a geographer develops an argument;
- get you enthusiastic about the subject so will want to study it further;
- challenge the *status quo* in a part of geography and suggest alternatives to the current orthodoxy;
- challenge you to re-think your views on a part of geography.

It is the last two of these - being critical of orthodoxy and of your own views - which are the most important. The critical thing is for you to be critical. Kneale (1999, pp65-71) develops in more detail the idea of critical thinking in geography.

The lecture format allows an expert in a particular aspect of geography to give you an overview of the subject based on his/her extensive reading and perhaps research. That wealth of experience and understanding, distilled into a 60-minute presentation, allows you access to the key points of a large volume of work by geographers. As such, it should be a sound platform for you beginning your learning about that part of geography.

Lectures will probably not only be retrospective (in the sense of reviewing previous work) but also be forward looking, identifying the key issues for future policy or for our theoretical understanding of the subject. This programmatic aspect of the lecture will be most strongly developed in final-year courses and it can be useful as a source of ideas for your dissertation or essays.

Given the popularity among staff of the lecture as a teaching device, it is perhaps surprising that the traditional lecture is often criticised by lecturers themselves as well as by students. If a lecture is to hold the class's attention for 60 minutes, it needs to be delivered in an enthusiastic manner. A lecture is, to an extent, a performance and the students are the audience; not all lecturers are top-rank performers. So some lectures will be rather dull. Also, some lecture topics are important but hard to convey in an exciting way. So, one of the criticisms of the lecture is that it is actually quite hard to

concentrate on a subject for as long as 60 minutes. Studies have shown that student attention is high at the start of lectures, declines slowly to a low point after 20-30 minutes, where it remains until attention picks up again in the final 5-10 minutes. Sometimes lecturers will use various devices to counteract this cycle of attention. Some are quite simple, such as varying their tone of voice, moving to another part of the lecture theatre to talk, and showing slides or overhead transparencies. Other ways of breaking up the lecture include asking you questions during the lecture or getting you to discuss a geography topic with your neighbour for a short period in the middle of the lecture.

Lectures are also criticised as being too lecturer-centred and hence too passive an experience. To an extent this is inevitable with this style of teaching; other teaching methods such as tutorials (which require you to be more involved) are used to counteract this. However, this criticism is also partly wrong. You should be active in lectures - you need to be thinking about what the lecturer is saying, and summarising the lecture in your lecture notes. That does require a lot of focused effort; it is just not as visible an effort as speaking in a tutorial or rushing around on fieldwork.

CARTOON 1 HERE

Here are a few tips on how to get the most out of your lectures.

1) If you cannot attend the lecture (perhaps because you are ill), copy someone else's notes. You will still learn something from a lecture at second hand.

2) The key things to look for in a lecture - and to record in your notes from it - are the *structure* given to the topic by the lecturer, the *key contents* (such as dates, definitions, people, formulae, events, data, and theories), and the *key arguments* which are described.

3) You need to be able to write notes quickly and accurately. Why not try to develop your own 'shorthand' of abbreviations for the frequently used terms in your courses? Here are some examples - *U* for unemployment, *A* for Africa, *Gn* for glaciation, *env* for environment, *dev* for development, *ch* for change.

4) Remember that the most important thing for you to do during a lecture is not to take notes all the time (though 60 minutes of feverish scribbling is a serious temptation) but rather to *listen actively*. A tape recorder might capture precisely all the lecturer's words but it will not tell you which ones are important and why they are important. Only you can do that, thinking about what you are hearing, sifting out the key issues and noting them down.

5) You might want to experiment with different methods of taking notes, e.g. lots of headings and sub-headings rather than text and sentences; using parallel columns of notes for different sections of the lecture; or graphical methods like mind maps and spider diagrams where items get put in boxes on the page and the boxes are linked by lines to show how the ideas in the boxes are connected.

6) After the lecture, make sure your lecture notes are properly labelled in terms of the course name and the lecture title. In your first year at university you might attend as many as 200-250 lectures, so obviously some sort of filing system will be helpful.

7) Soon after each lecture read over your notes and make sure they make sense and that you have got down all the points legibly. If not, check with a fellow student at the next lecture to see if they can fill in the gaps in your notes. Don't re-write your notes.

8) Think about the topic; go over the key points in your mind. Why is this topic important enough to warrant a slot in this course? How does this lecture relate to the previous ones in the course? Are there parallels between this lecture and those in other courses? Do you agree with the lecturer and what he/she said or the approaches or emphases used? A lecture is not a brainwashing exercise, no matter how eminent the lecturer is on this topic. You are expected to develop your own views and be able to support them.

9) Any lecture is only a summary of a huge volume of material. It is like a map, showing you the intellectual topography of a subject area. For the full detail which you will need if you are to do well in your essays and examinations, you will need to do the reading which has been recommended by your lecturer. Lecture notes are the starting point to develop an understanding of a subject - and so accurate comprehensive lecture notes are better than scrappy ones - but they are only the start.

10) So, after the lecture you will need to do the follow-up reading. It might be fun to share out the reading with a friend and then compare notes. Explaining to your friend the key points in what you have read will consolidate that material in your mind, and you can learn what was important in your friend's reading.

The traditional phrase 'reading for a degree' does actually describe what the ideal student should be doing - as a guideline, two or three hours of reading for each hour of lectures.

KEY TIPS

Don't make notes on everything the lecturer says - just the key points.

After the lecture, read over your notes and jot down the most important things you have learned from the lecture.

4.2 Tutorials

You may also be taught geography through the medium of tutorials at some point during your degree. A tutorial is a small group of students (outside Oxbridge, usually 6-12 students) who meet with a member of staff for an hour, often weekly or fortnightly. Tutorials can have two functions - one pastoral and the other academic.

The pastoral function

Some tutorials have a pastoral function - they are a device to allow you to discuss academic and personal problems with a member of staff who may be able to sort them out. Your department can use the tutorials to keep a watching brief on your progress. The general rule is that unless a problem shows clear signs of going away of its own accord, it is better to tackle it quickly. The earlier problems are dealt with, the better; problems often become harder to solve the worse they have become.

Remember too that your university will probably also have other sympathetic knowledgeable people whose skills lie in helping with difficult issues on a confidential basis - examples include your Students' Union, Nightline, Chaplaincy, Student Counselling, a Learning Support Unit or a college tutor. It would be a terrible waste if financial, medical or personal problems got to such a state that they threatened your continuing at university. For many people university may be their first time away from home, so some problems can be expected. Tutors will often have good ideas from their experience of previous students about how you can tackle any problems.

Academic functions

The other function of tutorials is to help you learn more effectively about geography and to develop new skills - why else would departments continue to use so expensive a method of teaching? Lectures are a much more 'efficient' way of teaching a large number of students.

Staff would probably argue that the benefits of tutorials derive from the way they can help you in the following ways:

- acquiring critical judgment (learning how to assess the strengths of various positions and arguments);
- active learning (you can be asked to learn geography in many different ways during a tutorial);
- practising how to apply principles to cases (beyond the examples given in the lectures);
- challenging attitudes and beliefs (higher education is a chance to think afresh about ideas);
- developing oral skills (you and 200 other students in a lecture theatre cannot hold a debate, but in groups of 6-12 you can);
- gaining practical skills (some of which are better taught in smaller groups);
- generating self-confidence (in your growing abilities);
- learning from other students (listening to what they say and how they argue and work);
- learning to work in a group (tutorials are just the right size for small-group work);
- promoting understanding (through debate and having the time to think ideas through);
- taking more charge of your learning and reflecting on your progress.

What happens in tutorials

Group work

A tutorial can be used to let you practise working within a small group of students to achieve together some common goal. You might be asked to produce a group report on some aspect of geography - together you discuss it, share the reading and research, and all contribute to the final report. Generally essays are completed by each student individually - you personally are solely responsible for it and the quality of the final essay is attributable to you. In a group project, however, you are usually collectively responsible. Somehow the group has to decide what to do, which is no easy task if, say, three vocal students each want to develop the project in a different direction. So, in a group, everyone has to learn:

- to weigh up the pros and cons of different tactics and find the best one;
- to compromise with others so that a single plan of action can be agreed;
- to work fully within that plan (even if there are parts of it that you do not much like) so that the final report will be as good as possible.

There is a general model of how groups form and work which is useful to bear in mind. The model (its originator was B. W. Tuckman) predicts that most groups go through four stages in their development.

Forming — The group members are polite, a little wary of each other, finding out how each other works and reacts.

Storming — People start to dislike each other and discover each other's agendas and shortcomings; some hostility may be evident; the group could collapse at this stage, or they realise that they may have to compromise with each other.

Norming and — Realisation that compromises have to be made; so ground rules are worked out to get the job done despite each other's weaknesses using each other's strengths.

Performing — The conflicts worked through and a *modus vivendi* established, people get to know and even like each other, and the job starts to get done to a common plan which everyone accepts.

The moral of this model of group work is that tensions are inevitable; the time has to be allowed for them to be worked through. So don't expect to get productive work done or results too quickly, not until the group has started to gel. Of course, the second project a group does will get going much quicker than their first.

Group work has its practical problems. One such is the lazy student who skives off and hopes to benefit from everyone else's efforts without contributing anything him/herself. The rest of the group will be expected by the Department to try to persuade the lazy student to join in. If you cannot, tell your tutor so that the lazy student does not get a free ride on your efforts. The opposite problem is the bully - the pushy loud-mouthed student who drives the project in his/her direction ignoring all others. If everyone agrees that the proposed direction is the best one, then that is

fine. If, however, the rest of the group has good grounds for disagreeing, you need to use your force of numbers to persuade him/her to back down. Again, the necessity of compromise is critical.

Working collaboratively is rarely straightforward but the experience of working together through the difficulties to achieve a successful outcome can be among the most rewarding and valuable experiences you have at university.

CARTOON 2 HERE

A useful device to help the group work well is to give every member a specific task. So, one person might agree to chair the group, a second might take charge of word-processing the final report, a third might draft section A, and so on. Each task is essential, big and important, and they all contribute to the overall progress of the project. For further details about group work there is good advice in Vujakovic *et al.* (1994).

An effective team is likely to be one which:

- agrees a plan of action and sticks to it...
- ...yet can be flexible when difficulties arise;
- trusts each other to work well and is not disappointed;
- helps each other out in a crisis;
- is sensitive to each others' needs and uses each person's talents in the best way;
- learns quickly from its mistakes;
- reviews progress regularly.

Group work in a tutorial is as much about learning how to work reasonably harmoniously and effectively with fellow students (and practising this skill) as it is about the specific topic of your project. Of course, in your career after university you will also have to work in groups, and so the experience will be useful and should be recorded on your *curriculum vitae* or *résumé* for potential employers to see.

ACTIVITY 7

After your next group project, jot down how well the group worked as a team. What went well? Why? What did the group do to produce this?

What went less well? Why? What did the group do to produce this?

Could you list a few do's and dont's to help achieve an even better outcome the next time you have to work in a group?

It is worth going through this list after each group project.

Discussions

The other main function of tutorials is to practise discussing geography. This lets you learn new material that comes up in discussion. It will also help you understand things that puzzled you or were not clear in lectures or your reading - you can ask the tutor questions so he/she can explain things more fully. But the main skill you will learn is how to discuss issues sensibly. Essays and examinations are about improving your *written communication skills*; tutorials are about improving your *oral communication skills*. This is partly a matter of gaining some self-confidence in speaking and you will never develop that if you spend the entire tutorial staring fixedly at your knees, hoping that by avoiding eye contact with your tutor you will never be asked to speak. If there is a debate, say a few words. If someone says something you do not fully agree with, say something like, "I see what you mean, but what about...?", or "how does that fit with...?", or "will that be true of every region?"

If the tutor asks you to prepare a ten-minute talk on something, the best preparation is to practise your talk several times beforehand so you can almost memorise it. If you have a script of what you want to say, try and lay it out with headings and sub-headings in big clear handwriting or typeface. Giving the group a handout to study while you are talking can also be effective. This handout might include photocopies of relevant maps and diagrams on your topic. You can use the handout for detailed facts and the talk itself for the overall structure and key ideas.

Remember, no one is going to laugh at you, because everyone else is probably going to give the same kind of talk and will not want an aggressive tone applied to theirs.

Finally, your tutor may be the person who marks your essays, especially in Year 1. So he/she is in an ideal position to give you constructive feedback, directly on your essays and more indirectly on your general progress. If you feel that the feedback is not detailed enough to be really useful, don't be afraid to ask for it to be elaborated. After all, it is only through constructive criticism that you can build on the things you are already quite good at and improve where you are rather weaker.

So, although tutorials are an expensive way to teach you, they do have clear aims which many geography departments value highly enough to justify continuing to teach in this way.

You will learn a lot from tutorials but only if you participate in them fully.

KEY TIP

In a tutorial:
(1) listen and learn;
(2) speak and contribute to the work of the group;
(3) enjoy working with staff and student colleagues.

4.3 Seminars

"When I use a word," Humpty Dumpty said in a rather scornful tone, "it means just what I choose it to mean, - neither more nor less".
Lewis Carroll

A seminar can take various forms but it usually means that a large group of students (perhaps the whole class or a third or half of them) meets for an hour or two to listen to one or more students giving a presentation on some aspect of a course. You may already have been asked to give a short talk (say, 10 minutes long) in the informal setting of a Year 1 tutorial. That will be good practice if you have to give a seminar which will be a more formal presentation usually in the later years of your degree. It will be more formal in the sense that it may last longer (say, 15-30 minutes), you may have to present the talk from the front of the class (as the lecturer would) and you may be expected to use presentational aids such as a slide projector, overhead projector or handouts. In the past every student might have given an individual seminar presentation. Ever-rising student numbers may mean that today you will be part of a group of students giving a group presentation. So the question is this: how are you going to use the nerve-racking business of a formal presentation to maximum advantage? Remember, your presentation may be assessed by the tutor and/or the class, so it is important to do it well.

To give a good talk you need to progress stage by stage.

1) As you would for an essay, analyse the question or topic. Pick out the key ideas, events or approaches to it - your background reading will help here.

2) Write out fully what you want to say, highlighting the key points. Do not read out your text; talk to your audience. Remember that this talk is to be listened to, not read; so keep your sentences shorter than you would in an essay. Also, listeners cannot go back and re-read - they hear it once only. So help them by having a clear structure and giving them audible clues (e.g. "First, I want to talk about...; then I shall move on to...").

3) A talk will often be helped by visual material. This could be a handout which summarises the headings and sub-headings of your talk, and shows the audience complex or detailed material such as maps, graphs, formulae, dates and statistics. A collage of material can be produced for a handout using the scale-reducing facility of a photocopier and scissors-and-paste. You may well find the raw material for this handout in the books or articles you read or on the Internet.

This material might also be presented to the audience as overhead transparencies (OHTs) or 'foils'- your tutor can advise you on the different sorts of transparencies and the photocopiers locally which will make OHTs. They are a particularly effective means of showing the audience the main features of your talk, using headings and sub-headings which you can talk to. They can also act as a prompt for you the

speaker, so you are not tied to your script line by line and have something to fall back on if you 'dry up' for a moment. Just make sure they are legible - a minimum of 20pt typeface and not too many words crammed on to each OHT.

If you have access to a reliable computer display system, then a PowerPoint presentation can be impressive, but have a set of OHTs as back-up in case the system crashes - it often does!

CARTOON 3 HERE

Giving the talk is tricky; at the front of the class, you are rather 'on stage'. Experienced speakers would give you this advice.

1) Practise the talk several times so that you have confidence that you have enough material (but not too much) for your allotted period of time.

2) Perhaps get a friend to listen to one of your practice sessions. Does your friend think that you spoke too slowly (boring) or too quickly (a gabble that was hard to follow)? If so, adjust your speed of delivery and perhaps the amount of material you are trying to cover in the time.

3) Speak a little more slowly than normal and build in pauses so people can write their notes. Repeat key points and summarise what you have said.

4) Try to look up and talk to the audience as much as you can, as opposed to reading from your notes all the time. The use of OHTs helps here (but don't stand between the overhead projector and the screen, so blocking the audience's view!).

If your talk is as a member of a team, your group will need to meet regularly to plan the whole talk, divide it into sections and allocate these to speakers. However, a single handout is still needed and each speaker should 'hand over' the rostrum smoothly ("... and now I hand over to Sam who will talk about...").

If your presentation is going to be marked, the criteria usually employed will include - audibility, clarity, structure, use of visual aids and handouts, and interest. So bear these issues in mind as you prepare your talk. Further details about how talks are assessed is given in Section 5.7.

When the seminar presentation is over, reflect on the fact that the next one you give will be a little easier as you build up experience and confidence. Being able to give a coherent and interesting talk (whatever the subject) is a useful skill for later life (which is why geography departments make you give seminars). So, having gained the experience, remember to note it in your *curriculum vitae* or *résumé* as another proven skill to your credit. Further advice on giving talks can be found in Hay (1994) and Young (1998).

KEY TIPS

Practise your talk beforehand.
Visual aids will help you and your audience.
Talk to your audience; don't read out your script.

4.4 Learning with the Internet

The Internet - the global network of interlinked computers - is potentially a very valuable resource to help you learn geography. It can help in four ways.

1) You can use the Internet to send e-mail messages. E-mail can keep you in touch with your tutor (particularly useful if he/she is hard to get hold of or if you are a distance-learning student), with fellow students perhaps including those working on group projects with you, and perhaps with your family. E-mail also lets you send whole documents over the Internet (called 'attachments') as well as short messages. So you might be able to submit your essays by e-mail rather than by post or handing them in personally. It is well worth getting familiar with how to use your local e-mail system - your department or computer service provider will show you the current procedures.

2) It is possible to join discussions over the Internet using on-line conferences, tutorials and discussion groups, perhaps with members from all over the world. These can often be a very useful way of joining in the debate on key issues and getting a fresh perspective on geography.

3) Your university will use the Internet to provide you with information about your courses, the library and the various departments. You can use the local system to check what is in the library catalogue, to recall books out on loan or check the university's rules and regulations. Some courses will have their lectures and other material on the Web so that you can use these anytime.

4) The Internet also supports the World Wide Web (the WWW or 'the Web'). The Web is a huge and rapidly expanding collection of documents (that is, computer files) which are written in a special 'language' (called HTML) which allows them to be read by anyone, wherever they are and whichever machine and software they are using. The Web gives you free access whenever you need it to a 'library' of information far greater than any actual university library can provide. But there are difficulties.

The Web is huge and rapidly changing, so how do you find things on it? There are programs ('search engines') where you type in what you want to find out about and then the program lists what is available. The problem here is that you may be faced with thousands of references - far too many to explore yourself. It is very easy to spend large amounts of time 'surfing the Web' and not actually getting anything useful. One way around this problem is to ask for information on detailed rather than general topics ('Chicago tourism' or 'Chicago' rather than 'cities' or 'America').

Is what you find on the Web any good? The Web is unregulated - its strength - so

anyone can put anything on the Web. It might be wrong, biased, partial, out of date or, despite its title, quite unrelated to your needs. A website may promise a lot but actually be a rather uninformative overview - you have to go back to the printed sources to get what you want. You have to judge the quality of what you find on the Web; you cannot assume that something is correct just because it is on the Web. A useful guide is to look for websites provided by apparently sensible, official or authoritative organisations.

You may also find that your tutor, department or library has provided a list of useful Web sites for your courses, that is, sites which staff have checked out beforehand as to their usefulness, trustworthiness and relevance. Such sites are efficient starting points. A list of useful websites is given by Kneale (1999, p38) and this is updated at the website http://www.geog.leeds.ac.uk/staff/p.kneale/skillbook.html.

If you put together all the facilities of the Internet you could create a virtual degree course using the Web (and a few already exist). You read lectures on the Web, join on-line tutorial discussions, search the Web for information, submit essays over the Internet and even go on virtual field courses to distant places without ever leaving your computer. All of these aspects of the use of the Internet already exist individually and many are now routine. The only thing that is still rare is putting them all together into a single on-line degree course, though this too is likely to change.

ACTIVITY 8

If you can get access to the Internet, find a website (say, your own university's) and see how good it really is.

1 Is it clear, interesting and easy to use, or is it a jumble of information?
2 Is it telling current and potential students what they need to know or is it just public relations and hype?
3 What does the site contain and what is missing?
4 Is it fully up to date?
5 Does it give interesting links to other computer sites?

REFERENCING WEB SITES

If you want to refer to material on a Website in an essay, it is important to give the correct reference to where you found the information. The reference for a Web site should have three parts:

- the real name of the site, including its provider's name (which is what appears in your text as the cross-reference to the full reference at the end of the essay);
- the full address/URL of the actual files or pages you used;
- the date when you visited the site since, unlike paper publications, Web sites can be changed after publication.

Here is an example.
In the text of the essay you might write this:

"Hurricane Zebra caused 1,000 deaths in Ruritania in 1998 (BBC News

Online, 1998)"

In the References section at the end of the essay you give the full Website reference:

BBC News Online (1998) *http:// www.bbc.co.uk/news/(the additional filenames to this story).html* (30 November 1998).

4.5 Fieldwork

Work expands to fill the time available for its completion.
C. Northcote Parkinson ('Parkinson's Law')

Fieldwork is fun (even when it is done in the pouring rain). It is one of the distinctive features of a geography degree. Yet it inevitably takes up a lot of staff and student time; organising it safely is demanding; and it places considerable financial burdens on students and departments. In general, students are now required to do less fieldwork during their geography degrees than previously. Some fieldwork, formerly conducted during the classic week-long residential field course away from the university, is now being replaced by day excursions in the university's local area. There are even some early attempts at virtual field courses during which you never leave your computer yet 'travel' to distant places. These rather lack one of the important unspoken merits of residential field courses - the way they let staff and students get to know each other well - which is often cited as one of the reasons for the generally good staff-student relations you find in geography departments.

Many will argue that fieldwork is central to geography. It shows you how places work and how they differ from each other. It lets you practise investigating the real world and it focuses attention on the way economic, social and physical processes are integrated and interact in particular places. Fieldwork, perhaps inevitably focusing on relatively small field sites, emphasises the smaller scale of geographical processes (people, businesses, local organisations) and the way (inter)national forces affect small areas, and how small areas react to these external forces.

Yet within geography there are debates on the proper role of fieldwork today. Some human geographers will argue that fieldwork is unnecessary since, like other social sciences, human geography is concerned with processes and theoretical approaches which have little need for real-world verification. Geography should be an intellectual training and not a practical one. Fieldwork, they might argue, concentrates too much on the unique and the specific to the detriment of our understanding of general spatial processes. This group would seek to minimise the fieldwork component of geography degrees, hence saving on staff time for field teaching. Other human geographers and many physical geographers would still subscribe to the traditional justification for fieldwork given earlier in this section, particularly when it is carried out in distinctive and unfamiliar environments. They might also argue that fieldwork needs to be better integrated into the curriculum in terms of project design and skills acquisition than it is currently. So the role of fieldwork is the subject of some debate among geography staff.

CARTOON 4 HERE

Whatever the balance of opinion on fieldwork in your department, the main things to try and gain from fieldwork (on day excursions and residential courses) are these:

- learning about places;
- learning specific skills;
- learning how to structure a field project;
- practising how to work around practical difficulties;
- appreciating the limitations of field methods.

These are what your tutors are trying to teach you when they take you on field courses.

Learning about places

Fieldwork is fun because it takes you to new places and gives you the chance to study them in detail. You get to see why that place is distinctive, how it is changing and 'what makes it tick'. It teaches you how to observe and be curious about places and that is how research often starts - observation and asking questions.

Learning specific skills

A field excursion can be used to teach you how to use a specific method of research or piece of equipment which cannot be demonstrated in the classroom. You have to go out into the real world to learn how to conduct a questionnaire survey of the public in the street or how to measure the speed of a river's flow. The range of skills you may be taught in the field is wide - for example, mapping, surveying, sketching, identifying plant communities, sampling soils, measuring landforms, surveys and interviews of the public or officials. You may not know which of these will be useful to you in the future, so note carefully how they are carried out and any pointers to good practice in their use. Even if none turns out to be directly useful, you have at least demonstrated your ability to learn practical skills and that is a skill in its own right which is worth having.

Learning how to structure a field project

Most days, the work on a field course will be structured as you would a small research project, with a number of phases.

- Set out the aims, research problem or research questions for the day; all research, including your dissertation, needs to be clear as to what it is trying to achieve.
- Select the appropriate method to tackle this research problem - every method has its strengths and weaknesses, so choosing the best one requires an appreciation of the various methods and a reasoned argument as to which is best under particular circumstances.
- Implement the field methods - actually using the methods or equipment in the real world to collect the data or information which you need to meet your aims.
- Collate and analyse the information you have collected so as to make sense of it and see what light it sheds on the original research problem.
- Write a concise report describing the four stages above and your conclusions, illustrated as appropriate by maps, graphs or photographs (see Lewis & Mills

(1995) for more detailed advice).
If these stages have not been clearly set out in a handout or briefing session, ask the tutor to explain what you are being asked to do.

Other research-type projects, and particularly your dissertation, will probably follow the same five stages, only on a bigger scale. So each day's work on a field course is an example in miniature of how to plan a project. In that sense it is worth looking behind the immediate detail of the work to see how the lecturer has constructed each task.

Practising how to work around practical difficulties

Fieldwork is about practicalities. Things will go wrong from time to time - the tide is too high for the beach survey; your interviewee is not in when you call; the rain prevents your photography; the equipment you were to use breaks down. Fieldwork should be faultless but rarely ever is. Learning how to work your way round such problems is a key skill in effective fieldwork. Employers like practical people who can show that they can cope with difficulties.

Appreciating the limitations of field methods

All field methods are good at some things and worse for others. They work better in some circumstances than others. There are better and poorer ways of putting them into practice. A good field worker appreciates these points and so is able to choose the best methods for any particular research situation. That is a useful skill to learn while on field courses.

Notes on safety during fieldwork are given in Section 4.11.

So to summarise, fieldwork is a surprisingly 'deep' experience. There is the surface level of exploring a new place - travelling somewhere, carrying out an investigation and finding out why that place is different from others and how it works. Then there is the deeper level of acquiring new research skills and learning how to structure a piece of research anywhere in the real world. Finally there is the level of critical appreciation of both specific research methods and of the use of case studies and fieldwork: you learn to assess how far they can improve our understanding of geography. Fieldwork has its limitations; you need to have done some fieldwork to really appreciate them.

KEY TIP

Ask yourself:
"what makes this place different?"
"how has this place changed?"
"why is this place changing?"

4.6 Practical classes

In many geography courses/modules, you may be required to undertake 'practicals'. Practicals can be found across geography but they are most prevalent in physical geography and the teaching of methods of geographical research (e.g. statistics, cartography, computer-based methods and GIS). They are usually based in a laboratory of some kind (rather than a lecture theatre or seminar room) and they may last for 1-3 hours. You may be able to do some practicals in your own time; others may require staff to be present to instruct or for safety reasons. The practical exercise may be given to you as a handout, in a work-book or on-line and you will be expected to work through each exercise.

There are four main reasons why practicals are used.

- They can illustrate a theoretical concept in a real-world situation. You often find that this makes the theory much clearer as well as showing how diverse and complex the world really is; it is often not as simple as in the textbooks.
- Practicals show you how to do research. They train you in defining problems, testing hypotheses, making observations, using analytical techniques and equipment safely and accurately, and presenting the results clearly and concisely.
- Practicals train you in specific skills (such as designing a questionnaire or measuring the speed of flow of a river) which are key skills in parts of geography.
- Finally practicals can be fun, breaking down any barriers among students and between students and staff.

Practicals are just that; sessions to teach you how to do practical things - such as analysing soil, measuring plant communities, analysing data or using a computer to draw a map. You need to understand what you are being asked to do, why a given procedure is useful and, in a critical sense, what its strengths and weaknesses are. Above all, you are learning how to do something carefully, precisely and successfully. Practical exercises are more likely to have a single right answer than essays or examinations. Usually practicals are assessed by writing up the aims, methods and results in a concise report with data, output or diagrams attached. Section 5.5 gives you more details on how to write up a notebook.

Practicals are also useful, not just for a particular course, but also as a way of building up a set of skills which will come together again for use in your dissertation - the ultimate geography practical. Getting the most out of practicals really involves regular attendance, attention to detail, clear notes, a crisp write-up and a critical approach which leads you to appreciate when a practical skill should or should not be used and, when it is, what its limitations are.

Practicals may be done by a group of students rather than individually so the ideas on group work in Section 4.2 are useful.

Notes on safety during practical classes are given in Section 4.11.

Learning new skills is important. Learning how to learn a new skill is even more important.

4.7 Dissertations and projects

If you steal from one author, it's plagiarism; if you steal from many, it's research.
Wilson Mizner

In most geography departments you will have at least the option of producing a project or dissertation - often it is a compulsory part of the geography degree which shows you how highly valued the dissertation is by geography staff.

The terminology varies but a project might be a research-based piece of work 5-7000 words long, while a dissertation will be longer, perhaps 10-15,000 words long. Both will be the equivalent (in terms of your final degree classification) of 1 or 2 full units of study. Dissertations are often started in your second-last year at university and handed in sometime during your final year. The summer vacation between the last two years can often be used to carry out field research for your dissertation. Many geography staff would view the dissertation as the most important single element of the geography degree, because it is here that you bring together all the skills and intellectual maturity that you have acquired. The dissertation is your chance to show that you are a good all-round independent geographer. Many departments place considerable importance on the dissertation and expect you to put a lot into it. It is your chance to work on something which really interests you and develop the study in the way you want it to go.

Fortunately, given its importance, you will probably be given specific training in how to produce a dissertation. There are also several very good books to help you with your dissertation which you may want to look at (Parsons and Knight, 1995; Flowerdew and Martin, 1997; Bell, 1993).

A dissertation is as much a process as a product. The product is the final long report and the process is how you create that report. It is on the process that we want to focus in this section. Probably the biggest problem comes right at the start - what are you going to study? What will your topic be?

- It has to be interesting to you.
- It should offer you scope to be creative and show the examiners your skills.
- It must be feasible for you.
- It must be safe.

Where might you look for ideas on your dissertation topic? Clearly a list of past geography dissertations in your department might be a useful source of ideas, though the poorer of these may not be very good role models! Your lecture courses may well have thrown up ideas about the key areas in geography today. Are there issues in the media that you could explore? Another tack is to consider your possible career and then devise a project that would let you work in that sector or with that sort of employer. Alternatively, you could choose first where you want to do the research (your home area, perhaps) and then focus on what seem like the most interesting current issues there. However you generate the ideas for your dissertation, it is always useful to write them down and show them to a tutor for a quick reaction.

The next stage is to expand your preferred dissertation topic into a linked set of

stages. The key questions now are; what? why? and how? What are you going to study? Why is it important to study this? How are you going to study it? The answer to the 'what' question will eventually become Chapter 1 (the Introduction) of your dissertation. The 'why' question's answer will become Chapter 2 (the Background to your study) and the 'how' question's answer will become Chapter 3 (your Methodology).

Planning something as large as a dissertation is complicated. You need to get organised so you get it all finished on time, so work backwards from the submission deadline to fit in all the activities. You need to make plans that are feasible for you - do you have the time, resources, skills, equipment and transport to do all that you want? How could you acquire these facilities? Is the topic safe and, if there are risks, how could you reduce them to an acceptable level? Finally, envisage the things that might go wrong - your computer breaks down, a key interviewee is uncooperative - and sketch out contingency plans for coping with these, as far as you can.

The keys to a successful dissertation are really quite straightforward - it is just tricky to remember them all:

- a good topic with lots of potential is essential;
- tell your examiners which general geographical issue your dissertation is a case study of;
- be bold in your planning (it may not all come off but aiming too low at the start is far worse);
- examiners often find it impressive when a student approaches a topic from different scales and uses different approaches to studying it;
- tell your examiners what you have learned from completing your dissertation;
- be boringly organised (it's quicker in the long run) since a dissertation is really as much a planning and management exercise as it is an intellectual one;
- expect something to go wrong, and don't panic when it does;
- keep in touch with your supervisor (he/she will help keep you on the right lines and up to the right standard, and his/her advice will be vital if there is a crisis);
- *and finally remember to enjoy your dissertation - it is the main part of your degree where you really are in charge and can develop along your own lines.*

More details on how dissertations are assessed are given in Section 5.6.

Notes on safety during dissertations are given in Section 4.11.

Additional guidance on dissertations can be found in Burkill and Burley (1996) and Flowerdew and Martin (1997). Hampson (1994) reminds us of the ups and downs which seem to be a feature of most people's dissertations.

KEY TIPS

At last, you're in charge of your studying!

Be bold in your planning and careful in your work.

Be clear on what is the aim of your work.

What is the 'big issue' to which your dissertation will relate?

4.8 Other methods of teaching geography

So far, we have looked at the principal ways in which geography is taught at university. In addition to these, there are other methods which are used less often.

You might be given a period of work experience (sometimes called work-based learning) where you work outside the university with an employer or organisation on a project of mutual interest. Usually the department will set up the link and the specific project, and then train you in how to work with the employer. Work-based learning can be used to give you an appreciation of how real-world organisations operate and it may also require an end-of-placement report which will be assessed. Clear oral communication and good team-work will be important for the success of a placement, as will meeting deadlines and being a congenial colleague. Work-based learning can take many forms but you need to ensure that you record on your *curriculum vitae* or *résumé* what you did and what you gained from doing it. At the end of it you can prove to potential employers that you can work successfully in the real world.

You might also be set various other types of exercise - writing a newspaper report in the style of a journalist on a geographical issue; producing a poster (see Vujakovic (1995) for advice); producing a video (see Lee and Stuart (1997) for guidance); or writing a guidebook to an area. Each of these methods is giving you practice in different styles of writing for different audiences, and in Section 5 we expand on how to do well in these tasks.

A few departments will have foreign exchanges - you spend part of your degree studying geography at a university in another country. Exchanges between the UK, North America and Europe are the most common examples. Aside from practical matters -the cost and possible foreign-language requirements - the key advantage with foreign exchanges is the way they let you experience another national culture and another university system. They are well worth considering, if available.

4.9 Learning using other resources

Among the other resources you can use to learn geography are the following:

- printed study packs
- computer-based modules
- collections of slides and photographs
- maps
- audio/video cassettes
- material on CD-ROM (e.g. statistics and recent newspapers)
- microfilm/microfiche (e.g. historical records and older newspapers).

You will usually be guided towards the study packs and computer modules by staff at the appropriate point during your course. The collections of slides and maps and the other resources are more likely to be useful during projects. Some of this material might be kept in your department, and some of it will be in the university library. There is more to geography than words in textbooks and journals, and these other resources can expand how you study places and communicate your findings.

Study packs and computer-based modules have the advantage that you can access them when it is convenient for you and work through them at your own pace. This can be particularly helpful for part-time students and those with other commitments in their lives. The chance to find your own materials to support projects is a good training in being creative, and learning how to find what you need - both of these are good career skills as well as enjoyable in themselves.

4.10 The library and ICT

The true University of these days is a collection of books.
Thomas Carlyle

The library and information and communications technologies (ICT or computer systems) will be important resources for you throughout your geography degree. These are where you will find the references to supplement your lecture notes and the background reading for your essays. They are complementary sources. Libraries tend to be well catalogued (it is easy to find out what is in the library) but it may be difficult to get hold of the actual item when you want it, if it is in heavy demand. The contrast is with ICT. The information resources available through ICT are not well catalogued (it is not easy to find relevant, good quality material for essays on the Web/WWW) but once you do find something you want, it is usually easy to get a copy by downloading it (providing the computer system has not crashed!). So you will need to use both your library and ICT facilities to get the reading material you will need.

<u>Libraries</u>

Every university is different in how it organises its library services - one central library or several departmental libraries, different classification systems for the books, different opening hours and borrowing arrangements. Yet there are a few general tips for using university libraries to best effect, bearing in mind that they are big, complex and heavily used facilities.

1) As soon as you arrive at university, learn how the library works. Pick up leaflets which describe the layout of the library buildings, their opening hours, how long you can borrow different classes of materials for, etc. Walk round the library to get its layout clear in your mind. Practise using the on-line computer catalogue to track down books and practise finding them using the 'classmark' as your signpost to where they are shelved. Attend any training sessions on the library run by the university or your department. The library probably has Web pages which will tell you a lot about how it works.

2) If a book or article is given as an essay reference it is likely to be in heavy demand. It is very useful to do the reading well in advance of the deadline for submitting the essay, even if you leave writing the essay until nearer the deadline.

3) If the library does not have the item you want, you can use the catalogue to do a 'subject search' to see what else they have on that topic. Browsing along the shelves at the classmark where the missing item should have been may also help you find other relevant material on the topic. The Library catalogue is often available through its Web site so you may not have to be in the library building to check its stock.

4) When you borrow books from the library, make sure you return them on time so that others can use them too.

5) If you get stuck, ask the library staff for help; they are there to answer your queries quickly.

ACTIVITY 9

Go to your university library and check that you know how to do the following:

- *use the computer catalogue to check whether the library has a book or journal on one of your courses' reading lists;*
- *find the book on the shelves;*
- *borrow it.*

You will need these skills throughout your degree course, so it will save you a lot of time if you learn them as soon as you can.

ICT

As with the library, ICT services are organised very differently in each university and these arrangements often change every few years as computing equipment, networking facilities and software are updated. The first step is to get your computer username and password when you enter university. These unlock the other facilities which are available via the computer system.

1) As with libraries, find out how the computer system works and what is available. So, pick up leaflets, attend training sessions and, armed with your computer username and password, log into a computer and explore the system.

2) If you are going to bring your own computer to university, it is helpful if its software is compatible with the university's system. If you don't have your own computer (and most students don't) find out quickly where the public-access computer laboratories are and their opening hours (some will have 24-hour access).

3) You may already know how to word-process, but if not, learn as quickly as possible, preferably using the software which is standard in your university system. This will help enormously with your essays.

4) ICT may also help you get access to background material for your essays, perhaps using the Internet. You can do searches to see what is available on computers around the world on 'development', 'Africa' or 'glaciation'. The answer is likely to be that there is a huge amount available and that much of it is either irrelevant, too basic or produced by biased sources. It is difficult to find good relevant material via the Internet for university-level essays. If you do manage to find something, remember to mention in your essay the source of this information, using the Web page's address (technically called its Uniform Resource Locator or URL) - see Section 4.3 for the details. Keep a notebook of the URL addresses of useful Web sites or 'bookmark' them if you have your own computer.

5) Use your ICT facilities to the full. Explore the available software and try it out. Some familiarity with a wide range of software will be useful in career terms.

6) If you get stuck with the ICT facilities, remember to ask for help from computer staff or fellow students; that is how to learn more about the systems.

ACTIVITY 10

Which new ICT skills have you learned in the last six months? This could be a single skill (e.g. sending an e-mail or creating a spreadsheet) or the use of a new piece of computer software. Add these skills to your Personal Record.

Which new ICT skills would you like to try to learn in the next six months?

KEY TIP

For a good degree in geography you need to know things and you need to know how to find out new things. Libraries and ICT can help with both of these.

4.11 Safety

Every geography department should have taken care to ensure that everything it asks you to do is fully safe, especially in terms of laboratory practical classes, fieldwork and off-site projects and dissertations. Absolute safety can never be guaranteed, but staff should have taken all reasonable precautions against all reasonably likely risks. This includes your safety with respect to accidents in the laboratory, natural hazards (e.g. when working near rivers or cliffs) and dangers to your personal safety while in rural and urban environments. You could ask to see the risk assessment of your impending fieldwork. Your tutor and yourself should work through a risk assessment of any fieldwork or projects before you start them.

If you ever feel concerned about your safety or the precautions which have been taken or should have been taken to minimise risks, you should bring your concerns to the attention of your tutor, course leader or someone in authority in your department. Equally the department has the right to expect you to behave sensibly when in potentially risky situations and to take all the precautions you were told to take as well as exercising normal commonsense.

4.12 Complaints

Franklin: *Have you ever thought, Headmaster, that your standards might perhaps be a little out of date?*
Headmaster: *Of course they're out of date. Standards are always out of date. That is what makes them standards.*
Alan Bennett

It is unlikely that you will have a serious complaint about how you have been treated by your department, but occasionally things do go wrong. Each department should have both a code of practice for how ideally it should treat students and a formally approved complaints procedure. Both these documents should be widely advertised on departmental noticeboards and in handbooks given to students. It is usually advisable to pursue complaints according to your local complaints procedure, once you have satisfied yourself that something really is amiss, perhaps by talking the issue over with another student. Sometimes it is best to take the matter up initially with the member of staff most directly concerned - the course tutor, for example, if you feel that an essay has been marked unfairly. In other cases (for example, if you are being harassed by a member of staff) the head of department might be a better person to contact. You could ask your year representative to raise the issue at the next meeting of the staff-student committee or Board of Studies.

The exact procedure will depend on the nature of the problem, but most departments now accept that occasionally things will not happen as they should and that it is in the department's best interests as well as the student's that complaints are dealt with promptly, fairly and according to an established procedure.

CARTOON 5 HERE

Conclusion

Geography has traditionally used a wider range of teaching methods than many other subjects and the range has tended to expand further over the last few years. This is a major strength of geography at university, since it will give you a more varied experience of higher education than if you had chosen some other subject. Nothing but lectures, essays and examinations, year after year, might get rather tedious. This chapter has tried to explain the methods of teaching and learning geography and suggest how you can get the most out of them.

Of course there is also the question of how as a geography student you will be assessed, and the next section describes the different methods of assessment used in geography departments, and how you can do well with them.

5

UNDERSTANDING HOW YOU WILL BE ASSESSED IN GEOGRAPHY

Throughout your geography degree you will be assessed by staff (and sometimes by fellow students) to see, basically, how good a geographer you are and whether your performance is improving or not. Many departments will use the trend in your marks as an important indicator - a falling trend will set alarm bells ringing and staff will be particularly keen to help you get back on track.

The most common methods of assessment are:

- examinations
- essays
- field and laboratory notebooks
- dissertations and projects
- oral presentations
- posters, Web posters and press reports.

In this chapter we shall describe each of these methods of assessment, explain why lecturers use them, what they and you can gain from this assessment, and tell you the features of a good performance in each type of assessment. It helps to know what examiners are looking for!

But before that, we need to explain a couple of general points about university assessment - the first concerns the relationship between academic progression and marking, and the second concerns how the marking process works.

5.1 Academic progression and marking

There are two models of how academic progression will affect the way your work is marked. The first, the 'one-standard model', takes the quality of work staff would expect from a final-year student as the one academic standard against which the work of students in all years is judged. If your department uses this model, you will find, not unexpectedly, that all students' marks will be rather low in the first year and, on average, will improve steadily up to the final year. These low marks can be disconcerting for new students used to the higher marking scales at school; it really

does bring you down to earth with a bump.

In the second model, the 'rising-standards' model, there is a separate standard for each year of the degree - that standard being what staff can reasonably expect students in that year to achieve. These standards rise in successive years of the degree scheme. If your department is using the rising-standards model, the average mark for a class may change little from first to final year (assuming that the effectiveness of your teaching and learning roughly keeps pace with the rising expectations of the lecturers). That apparent lack of progress can be rather dispiriting. Some students may be able to improve faster and so out-perform their colleagues and achieve a rising mark trend.

Departments will often not tell you (and may not even have collectively thought about) which model of progression and marking they are using. Hence it is not surprising that some mixture of the two models is what is used in practice. First-year marks are usually lower on average than final-year marks - that is the 'one-standard' model in operation. This tends to be tempered to some extent by an acceptance among staff that first-year students will inevitably know less and be able to argue and write less well than final-year students. So first-year marks will tend to flatter you a little and you will have to do better next year if you want to get the same marks in your essays and examinations. Only in factual tests (where each question has a single correct answer) should you be able to achieve high marks as easily in each year with the same amount of effort.

5.2 **What is being marked**?

Another general question about marking your work at university is this - what are the staff marking? Is a mark of 60 per cent twice as good as a mark of 30 per cent and how do you measure 30 and 60 per cent? In some types of assessment (such as practicals and factual tests) the system of marking is obvious. The test is divided into many small sections, each has a single correct answer, and you either get a section right (and so gain a mark) or you don't. Your final mark is just the sum of the section marks and you can check this yourself when you get your work back.

However, for many types of assessment, such as essays and examinations, there is no such easy way of calculating or checking your mark. The examiner will have in his/her mind a checklist of things to be looked for - certain factual material, attention to key theories or approaches, a certain quality of argument and writing, evidence of reading, and correct procedures for referencing what you have read. However, the final mark will be an overall judgement of the essay or examination and not a simple summation of marks for particular parts of the work. So, ten students might each get a mark of 55 per cent for their answers to the same essay title and yet each will have achieved that mark by a different 'route', that is, a different combination of good and bad points. What the marker should do is to write a commentary at the end of your essay, perhaps supplemented by a mark sheet, which sets out what was good and bad about your essay, where you gained and lost marks, and how you could have improved the work. Criticism, provided it is constructive criticism, should help you improve.

You might wonder whether you can trust the marker's judgement. Your department should have given you guidelines to its marking, telling you what they expect and what the marks of, say, 50, 60 and 70 per cent mean for all the main types of assessment. Most departments also have a system whereby a second member of staff will check the marks given by the first marker. In the UK there is always an 'external examiner' - a senior geographer from another university - who is there to ensure that your department keeps up its standards and marks consistently and fairly. How to make a complaint about the way your work has been marked was discussed in Section 4.12.

Since a lot of university assessment is about 'academic judgements' and the way staff view their specialisms, it is very useful for you to try and pick up cues and clues. What do Dr X and Professor Y really want in essays and examinations? Some things may the same as most staff are looking for - the rest of this Section tells you what these are - but other things may be more related to their personal preferences and beliefs. It is worth trying to work out what these are, based on their lectures, comments on your essays and publications. To an extent you can think of university assessment as a 'game' with semi-public rules, and your task is to play that game as well as you can.

5.3 Examinations

In examinations those who do not wish to know ask questions of those who cannot tell.
Walter Raleigh (1923)

The typical British university examination comprises a timetabled period of one to three hours during which you have to write answers to questions you have not seen before on a course of study which you have just completed. There are many variations on this basic pattern - there may be from one to four questions to be answered; you may have a free choice of questions or some specific questions may be compulsory. Mostly, the questions require a short essay-type of answer but sometimes briefer factual answers or even a battery of multiple-choice questions may be used. You will always be told beforehand what the structure of the examination is going to be, and previous years' examination papers will often be available for consultation in your departmental or university library or on-line. Sometimes the class will be shown the examination paper before the examination day so you can all research your answers; more often the examination paper is 'unseen'.

Examinations are still a favoured method of assessment among staff because they have the following advantages;

- you can guarantee who wrote each answer; this is not always possible with essays where students can copy from books or the Internet ('plagiarism') or from each other ('collusion');
- everyone has exactly the same amount of time to provide their answers;
- the examination forces you to revise widely across the subject even though you will answer only a few questions (an unseen examination paper tests your *breadth*

of knowledge whereas an essay tests your *depth of understanding* of a small area);
- you need to know the subject area well and have an agile mind to construct an answer quickly (both these qualities being respected among academics).

Of course, from your point of view, an examination can be a very high-stress experience with so much depending on how you perform on the day itself. The fairness of the examination may be less complete than it might seem since illness could hinder some people on the day, and people react in different ways to stress - some positively and others negatively.

It might be useful to record here the commonest reasons why some people under-perform during examinations; you can easily convert these reasons into a list of do's and don'ts for your own examinations.

Leaving all the background reading for the course until the last minute or not doing any at all and relying on lecture notes alone.

Examiners are specifically looking for a much wider understanding of the topic than there was time to give in their lectures. Use other authors' works and reference them in your answer ("The work of Smith shows that..." "Jones's theory was important because..." "During the debate between Brown and Green...").

Not answering the question.

You must answer precisely the question set, and not the question you desperately wish the examiner had asked. So, if the question is "Explain the growth of cities in Latin America since 1950", you must do just that. "Explain" (and not just describe); "the growth" (rather than just their current structure); "of cities" (and not rural communities); "in Latin America" (and not other continents except perhaps a passing reference to how Latin American cities are different from or similar to those in other areas); and "since 1950" (and not earlier periods except perhaps a modest reference to differences in urban growth before and after 1950).

Poor structure to the answer.

A good examination answer, like a good lecture, will have a clear structure which is set out in the first paragraph of the answer ("First, I shall... Then I shall.... Finally... ."). The answer should then follow this structure, each paragraph being a discussion of a separate item.

Limited knowledge of the subject.

You will be expected to demonstrate a thorough knowledge of all the processes, approaches, theories, policies or events that are relevant to your topic.

Excessive factual detail.

This is the opposite fault to the preceding one. You have memorised the factual detail (good!) but you don't construct an argument which is supported by those details. The facts are usually the item of secondary importance in a good examination answer. The primary elements are the key ideas and arguments and the structure of the answer.

Not writing enough.

For each one-hour question (and assuming that you have normal-sized handwriting) you should aim to write at least four sides of the standard examination book used in universities. That means writing quickly but still legibly. If you usually 'write' your essays directly onto a computer, you may need to practise quick legible handwriting. Remember to leave yourself enough time to answer all the questions; don't overrun on the answer to one question and eat into the time left for the next one. One of the commonest faults is running out of time, meaning that the final question you answer is your shortest and poorest one.

Waffle.

This is a favourite comment by examiners. It means that what you have written is either irrelevant, a set of unrelated points or is vague, lacking in details and could almost have been written by any intelligent passer-by who had not even taken the course.

So, if the points above are the pitfalls to avoid, how are you to get better at writing examination answers? The best advice is to practise by trying to answer the questions on previous years' examination papers, assuming that the course has not changed since then! Particularly useful is *practising the first five minutes of an examination answer* when you sketch your answer plan in pencil. Once you have got that right (detailed, well structured, comprehensive, focused on the question set) then the remaining period of the answer time should be the rather easier task of actually writing it out, paragraph by paragraph, according to the plan and as quickly and legibly as you can.

Hay (1996a, 1996b, 1997) provides further advice on sitting examinations.

KEY TIPS

Revise the key points, not everything.

Practise planning the answers to examination questions.

Answer exactly the question set.

Show you have understood the topic and read widely on it.

ACTIVITY 11

Write down your most recent examination marks. See if you can get the individual question marks as well as the overall marks for whole papers - but not all universities will release these. What is the trend in your marks?

Reviewing the questions you answered and their marks, can you explain the trend? Could your tutor help explain your examination marks?

5.4 Essays

Learn to write well, or not to write at all.
John Dryden

The essay is another traditional form of assessment at university. The procedure is usually for you to be given a set of topics from which you select one on which to write within a word limit, often between 1500 and 3000 words. You may be given a list of references to books and articles which the lecturer feels you should read so as to help you produce a better essay, or you may have to rely on references in the course handout. In either case it is always worthwhile browsing the shelves of the library or searching its computer catalogue to find other books on the same topic. An essay is a chance to read deeply about one small part of the course, unlike the breadth of coverage which is the aim of the examination. Furthermore, an essay is usually a test in constructing an argument rather than just a listing of facts or chronicling of events. Departments will also expect an essay to conform to a traditional style of academic writing, as used in journal articles, for example. Most departments will give you detailed guidelines on the current acceptable style for academic writing with its many curious conventions (see also Turabian, 1987).

The title of an essay usually contains a command word - an instruction as to what you should do. Common command words include - describe, explain, assess, evaluate and discuss. It is important to be clear what these command words mean.

> *Describe* is the simplest command and most often found in Year 1 essays. It means "what happened, where and when?" (e.g. "Describe the formation of drumlins").
>
> *Explain* means that you have to tell the examiner how some state of affairs came about (e.g. "Explain the phenomenon of global warming"). This may involve a sequence of events or processes and some set of arguments as to why things had to occur the way they did. There may also be competing or conflicting explanations which you should set out.
>
> *Assess* is often used in the context of measuring the effect that one thing has on another (e.g. "Assess the effect of transport costs on industrial location"). The implication is that transport costs have some effect on industrial location (the extent of that effect might vary among countries or industrial sectors or

historically) but that there are also other factors which are simultaneously influencing industrial location. Your job is to say how important transport costs are in relation to these other factors. If the question was "assess the influence of geology on coastal erosion", you would have to compare the effects of the geology with the effects of, say, climate, wave action and tidal conditions.

Evaluate may be similar to 'assess' but is often used in a more general sense of asking you to discuss the good and bad points of some theory or statement (e.g. "Evaluate Smith's theory of migration" or "Evaluate the utility of chaos theory in geomorphology").

Discuss is the least precise of the command words but also the most often used! It is nearest in meaning to 'evaluate', but will also have elements of 'explain' and 'describe'. Suppose that the question was "Discuss the effects of modern agriculture on European landscapes and wildlife". You need to start by describing what effects modern agriculture has had on different landscapes; then explain why agriculture has had these effects; and finally evaluate how important these effects are have been ecologically, aesthetically and politically.

Whatever the task you have been set by the command word, a good plan is to follow this sequence of preparations.

1) Think about the topic; brainstorm it. What might it involve? What possible issues or approaches are there? What should you be reading about? When you start reading around the topic, what would you expect the books to be talking about? Jot down your ideas. This phase, so often omitted, is very useful for sensitising you to the subject matter and bringing into play what you already know of the topic from the lectures and your background knowledge.

2) Well before the deadline for submitting the essay, read the references for it and anything else on the topic which you can find on the library shelves or on the Web. As you read, you are looking first of all for the ideas you noted down in Phase 1 above. Second, you are looking for new ideas that did not come to mind in Phase 1. Take notes of the elements from your reading that seem interesting and might be used in your essay. Always record where (i.e. in which book or article) you have found anything you might use in your essay ("the source of the reference"). Mills (1994), Hay (1997) and Kneale (1999, pp146-152) give more details about referencing.

CARTOON 6 HERE

You might need to re-think how you read so as to get it all done. It helps to have thought about the topic *before* you read anything, so you can spot what is significant or useful. It also helps to learn to skim-read. Don't read every word on each page but skim quickly through paragraphs hunting for useful ideas and material.

- First, read fully things like the abstract, introduction and conclusions so as to get the gist of the text clear.
- Then skim through the main body of the text, picking out just the key points and

noting them down. It is much quicker, and just as effective, to skim read an item twice as to read every word of it once. The key points you are looking for are these:

- the author's arguments, standpoints and ways of thinking
- definitions and ideas
- events and evidence
- problems and issues
- hypotheses, theories and explanations
- questions and conclusions.

- Finally, when you get to the end of the item, pause and reflect on the key points you got from it. Why do you think the lecturer recommended you to read this item? What did he/she hope you would gain from it?

If you can speed up your reading by skimming the texts, you will have the time to read more. But always set a limit to how long you let this reading phase last. No one can read everything and you will not be expected to. If you can afford to devote a week, say, to producing an essay, then you can set aside only two or three full days for the reading. Do as much as you can in that time and then move on to the next stage. Kneale (1999, pp48-52) provides some more advice on fast and effective reading strategies.

3) Back to the thinking again. After you have read all you need or have time for, think again about the essay topic and try to sketch an answer to the question. Where is your essay going to begin? What issues should it include? What might the conclusion be? You may need an essay plan which sets out the broad sections of the essay (e.g. introduction, early theories, recent developments, conclusions) and then the sections can be sub-divided further into sub-sections each of which could be a paragraph. Some people find it useful to write down each of their ideas for the essay on a small piece of paper; they can then literally shuffle the ideas around until they get a sequence of points that makes sense and answers the question that was set. The essay will end with a "Bibliography" (a list of all the items you read for it) and the "References" (a list of the sources of the quotations or facts you used).

4) Now you need to write the essay, paragraph by paragraph. If you word-process the essay, you can correct errors and amend your text very quickly. Word-processing is a skill well worth acquiring soon if you are not already familiar with it. Diagrams or maps might be added to the essay if that will help you convey your ideas. If you incorporate into the essay facts or text from another source (e.g. a book or the Web) remember to give the full reference to where you found it. This will avoid the serious charge of 'plagiarism', that is, passing off other people's writing as your own. It is also a serious offence to write an essay with another student (the charge of 'collusion') so that your essays are very similar (unless of course you were told to work in groups). When you have finished the essay, leave it for a day or two and then return to it so you can polish the style, spelling and grammar; it is important to get these right. If the essay ends up rather longer than the word limit you have been set, you can now edit it, cutting down or removing sentences or sections that are not really essential or could be summarised.

The only problem with phases 3 and 4 above is that they work well for some people who thrive on plans and carrying them out, but they do not work for those whose

ideas become clearer only when they have written things down. For this group the normal process of revising the first draft of the essay may be far more than a tidying-up operation. Reading the first draft might alter their ideas completely and lead to a full re-write. In such cases you have to start the essay well before the deadline for handing it in, so as to leave time for the re-writing.

When you get your essay back, look not only at the mark you get but also at the comments. Every essay could be improved, whether it gets 75 per cent (an excellent university mark) or 45 per cent (a poor mark). So read the lecturer's comments and think about how you might have done it better. Try to learn from each essay so that the next one will get a higher mark. If the lecturer's comments are not full and clear enough to give you ideas on how to do better, do not be afraid to ask him/her for more feedback. You can also swop essays with fellow students to see if there are any features of their style, structure or use of material that you could adopt.

Another tricky aspect of essays is the problem of knowing what the percentage mark you get for the essay means. You need to remember that, although there are differences among staff in what they value in an essay, there are many common understandings among them as to the features of good and bad essays. The key is to appreciate that a percentage mark is not a simple measurement of quality in the sense that a person's age or height can be easily measured by a single number. Essays are marked according to how they match certain profiles of good, average or bad essays and then the percentage mark is applied to the essay as a final summary of quality. So, an essay getting 60 per cent (an average mark) is much better than one getting 30 per cent (a fail mark) but not necessarily precisely twice as good (in the sense that a person aged 60 is twice as old as someone of 30).

Here is a rough guide to what marks mean in British universities and the features of essays which will lead to these marks. Your department should provide you with their 'grade descriptors' for essays and the other types of assessment they give you. The exact matching of percentage marks and 'classes' may vary a little among universities but this guide is fairly precise.

> *First class; marks over 70%; A grades*
> Precisely answers the question; has understood all the key aspects of the question; uses material from independent reading; factually accurate; covers all the main arguments; can deal with areas of academic controversy; can explain complex issues clearly; can evaluate competing positions; some originality of argument and independent thought; sensible, balanced treatment of the issues; very well structured and written.
>
> *Upper second class; 60-69%; B grades*
> Answers the question; has understood most of the aspects of the question; uses some material from independent reading; factually accurate; covers most of the arguments; tackles to some extent issues of debate in the literature; reasonable explanations of complex issues; aware of debates in the literature; well structured and written.
>
> *Lower second class; 50-59%; C grades*

Answers some aspects of the question; reasonable structure; mostly uses material from the lectures and only one or two other sources; deals with factual and descriptive material better than issues, arguments, debate or theory; may be lacking in specific examples; may have unsupported statements; structure may not be clear; written style will be acceptable but weaker in terms of fluency, spelling and grammar.

Third class; 40-49%; Poor grades
Only a few aspects of the question are tackled; may contain substantial elements of irrelevant material; almost no theory or higher-level issues; tends to over-generalise; solely concerned with events and facts; errors of fact; very little structure to essay; written style very poor in terms of spelling, grammar and powers of expression; basic outline of the topic and basic ability to write about it.

Fail; marks under about 40%
Not an acceptable essay for someone who has taken the course; shows little understanding of the topic; does not answer the question; shows little appreciation of the question set; unstructured essay; serious flaws in written English; could almost have been written by a passer-by who had not taken the course.

In general an essay which squarely meets one of these 'templates' will get a mark in the middle of the range (e.g. 55% or 65%). One which is approaching the qualities of the next higher class of answer will get a mark at the top end of the range (e.g. 58%-59%, or 68%-69%). An essay which only just gets into the class will get a mark of 50%-51% or 60%-61%.

This guide to what university essay marks mean is only a guide; individual lecturers will differ to some extent in terms of the value they put on factual material or good English. This marking guide refers to essays. The marking of examinations will be similar as will that for dissertations, whereas the marking of practicals will tend to use different criteria and a wider range of marks.

Finally, you will probably be given a deadline for completing each essay. These deadlines are important and you may be penalised if your essay is late - so start each essay early. Don't leave it to the last week before the deadline - the books you need to read will probably have been borrowed and you are vulnerable to computer systems breaking down.

Further advice and examples of good essay writing can be found in Fitzgerald (1994), Hay (1995, 1997), Creme and Lea (1997) and Barrass (1995).

KEY TIPS

With each essay, leave plenty of time to read, think, plan, write and revise. So start early!

Learn from each essay - what worked well and what needs more work?

ACTIVITY 12

Gather together your most recent essays or other assignment marks and review the marks and comments you received. Do the same comments keep reappearing as good or bad points on your essays? What are they?

Focusing on the weaker points, what could you do to overcome them in future assignments? If you are unsure of the way forward, could your tutor help you?

5.5 Field and laboratory notebooks

The notebook is a very different kind of writing compared with examinations and essays. A notebook - it may be a hardbound volume, a ring binder or a wallet file of loose sheets - is essentially a record of events. It records the project you did on the field course or the analyses or experiments you carried out in the physical-geography or computer laboratory. As such, the emphasis is on the clear recording of methods, events, circumstances, observations and results. The written style should be concise - even in note form. You will probably wish to include graphic material such as a graph of results, a sketch of the apparatus, a map of the field area, photographs or illustrative brochures of the locality. Finally, depending on the circumstances, it may also be appropriate to include a section on the conclusions you draw from this field study or laboratory procedure and also to set out the limitations of the fieldwork or laboratory procedure and the analyses. Recommendations might be made for further studies on the topic which would overcome some of these limitations. Lewis and Mills (1995) and Sussams (1998) expand on these points and give more detail about good practice in writing notebooks, as does Kneale (1999, pp154-159).

The features of a good notebook will be its logical organisation, comprehensiveness, neatness and clarity.

5.6 Dissertations and projects

You can't turn a thing upside down if there's no theory about it being the right way up.
G K Chesterton (attributed to)

A dissertation or project may well be a major component in your degree, amounting perhaps to 10 or 20 per cent of the marks on which your degree will be classified; so it is important to know how a dissertation is assessed. The structure of a dissertation and the reasons for asking you to produce one were described in Section 4.7. The criteria for assessing a dissertation or project will reflect these reasons.

1) *Your choice of topic* will be assessed. Credit will be given where it is a novel, feasible and interesting subject, rather than one which has been done frequently before and has limited scope to say anything new. A novel approach to an old topic will also be looked on favourably.

2) *The structure of the dissertation* (as set out on its index page) will be marked. The dissertation should follow a logical progression, starting from our current understanding of the topic, through your primary (i.e. original) research on some aspect of the subject, to general conclusions on this aspect of geography.

3) *The quality of the literature review* which establishes our current understanding of the topic will be checked. Is this review complete and well written using the criteria for essays given in Section 5.4 of this Guide? Does the literature review lead on to the subsequent research and justify why it should be carried out?

4) *Your research methods* will be studied carefully. Have you used the appropriate methods (or more likely the right combination of methods) to research this subject and have you justified your choice of methods convincingly? Have you used the methods correctly?

5) *The analysis your results* (quantitatively and/or qualitatively) needs to be effective. Have you done this correctly and are your results clearly set out?

6) *In your conclusion*, do you use the results of your research to improve people's understanding of the general area of geography you selected?

7) *Is the dissertation well presented* in terms of its use of English, graphical material and maps? (see Turabian, 1987).

A very good dissertation is one which scores highly on all these criteria. Flowerdew and Martin (1997) and Parsons and Knight (1995) give fuller treatment of these issues.

5.7 Oral presentations

In recent years many departments have included oral presentations in their teaching and assessment repertoires. The idea is that students not only need to be able to write well (as tested by essays and examinations) but also should be effective speakers. Much of the cut-and-thrust of working lives consists of discussions, meetings and debates. So you will often find tutors and lecturers requiring you to give talks and wanting to assess your performance.

Your department might start in Year 1 by asking you to give a talk as part of the

tutorial system - a short talk, in an informal setting, with a small audience and probably not assessed. In later years the presentations may become longer (20-30 minutes), the setting more formal (standing in front of the class), the audience larger (a whole class) and the presentations may be assessed now that you have had some practice in giving talks. The bigger the audience, the more you have to speak loudly enough to be heard; it will become a more impersonal address rather than a talk to a few colleagues.

Practice Giving a good talk is partly a matter of practice; you will learn from each talk you give and so get better at it. There are a number of ways of achieving competence in oral presentations as quickly as possible. The first is to prepare your material thoroughly - make sure you include all the relevant material that time will allow. In this sense the talk will be assessed much as one would an essay.

Audience Then you need to consider your audience. Imagine that you were in the audience listening to the talk. You would want the speaker to help you by giving a really clear structure to the talk right at the start. It would help if they spoke clearly, repeated key points while you took notes, and gave examples of trends or issues. That could be the model for your talk. How can you get your material across as effectively as possible? Would a handout help for statistical or graphical material, photographs or key facts? Would an overhead transparency (a 'foil') be useful to show the main stages in your talk and perhaps also statistical material? Would slides be useful? Don't use any of these devices just for their own sake; but if you feel that they would help get your ideas over better, then do use them. You also need to check beforehand exactly how the slide and overhead projectors work. Unless you are a professor, mechanical incompetence does not inspire confidence.

Rehearsal The next stage is the rehearsal. Run through your talk so that you are fluent with the ideas, words and use of the visual aids. Check the talk is the right length and, if it is not, then add or cut out material. It might be useful to have someone as your rehearsal audience to check on whether you are audible and not speaking too fast. The most common faults with talks are that they are delivered too rapidly (and so become an unintelligible gabble) or are inaudible as you mumble nervously to yourself.

After you have carefully prepared your material and practised it, the actual presentation should be a little easier. Try and talk to the audience and not just read your notes all the time. If something goes wrong or you 'dry up', don't panic - you have your notes, so find where you left off and just carry on without fuss.

If your presentation is going to be assessed - this may be by the lecturer alone or by the lecturer and the class jointly - the likely assessment criteria are these:

- the structure of the talk;
- the completeness and accuracy of the material;
- the presentation itself (audibility, eye contact with the audience, speed of speaking);

- your use of visual aids;
- whether the talk was interesting.

Hence the advice in this section is directly targeted at helping you score highly when your oral presentations are assessed. The articles by Hay (1994) and Young (1998) and Hay's book (1997) are valuable sources of hints and tips on oral presentations.

The key to public speaking is keeping going even though you may feel nervous.

KEY TIP

When giving a talk, think of your audience; they (like you) would wish to listen to things which are clear and interesting.

5.8 Posters, Web posters and press reports

Posters

A poster is one of the less commonly used assessment methods, but you may be asked to produce one, perhaps as a member of a group. The idea is to convey some geographical material to a lay audience, as opposed to essays and dissertations which are specially written in an academic style for an academic audience. So a poster will comprise short blocks of text, photographs and graphic material with a very simple linear structure which can be picked up and followed through quickly by readers who are virtually passers-by. They will be looking at your poster on a wall from a distance of two or three feet. You need something eye-catching but not off-putting. So the poster has to be bold and clear. It should be attractive to look at and structured so that the reader's eye is led through it from start to finish. You do not want a lot of text nor a complex structure. You might try something along these lines:

- here is an issue;
- here is how it manifests itself and why it is important;
- here is what can/should be done about it.

Not all geographical subjects lend themselves to the poster format. Suitable ones are those which are currently public issues such as a proposed new road, global warming or the incidence of crime. Hay (1997) and Vujakovic (1995) give more examples of good poster writing.

A development of the paper poster is a Web poster. The principles are the same - being concise and clear, and using visual material effectively. Additionally you can add hyperlinks to other Web sites so a Web poster is potentially 'expandable' and, with the right computers, could include sound tracks and moving images as well as static text and pictures.

CARTOON 7 HERE

Press reports

A different but related task is to write a press report on an issue. You might be asked to write an article of, say, 1000 words in the style of a quality newspaper. Again, the aim is to teach you how to write in a non-academic style without losing accuracy or intellectual integrity. The journalist's style of writing is distinctive so, to do a good job, you first need to read newspaper articles unusually closely, so as to analyse the use they make of, for example, short sentences and paragraphs. The first paragraph of a newspaper report sets out the issue immediately and clearly (it is not an introductory preamble as you would use in an essay). A press report might include quotations from those affected by the issue. To do well with a press report exercise you need to absorb quickly a new style of writing and yet still produce a fair account.

5.9 Peer assessment and self-assessment

Sometimes departments will ask you to mark another student's work (peer assessment) or to mark your own work (self-assessment). This may seem strange at first sight - it is the staff's job to do the marking, isn't it? However, there is a point to this. To be able to mark someone else's work fairly you have to both know the subject and know what are realistically the features of a good performance in that kind of assignment. The important point is to be able to justify your comments and your mark. Once you have identified what makes other people's academic work good, you can use these insights to improve your own work. In later life being able to judge things fairly is an important skill. At first it is unnerving being a marker, but you will get better and more confident at it.

Self-assessment is similar. It is really a learning experience and a chance to reflect on where you feel that you have made good progress and where you got stuck. Comparing your assessment of your work with your tutor's is instructive. Students are usually surprised at how close the agreement is. Even better, try assessing your work *before* you hand it in; you might be able to improve it.

5.10 Marks and degree classification

For each piece of coursework you will get a mark. What usually happens then is that the marks from the examination, essays and other coursework for each course/module will be amalgamated to give you an overall course/module mark. Your course/module guide should tell you the relative weight given to each piece of assessed work (e.g. 50:50 examination and essay; or 70:30 examination and practical exercises).

Then your university will bring together all your course/module marks to give your

final class of degree or grade point average. Each university does this differently so you will need to find out how it is done in your institution. There will also be different rules on what happens if you fail a unit, need to re-sit assessments or wish to appeal against your degree result. Again, it is worthwhile to find out about these local rules and regulations - hoping, of course, that you never need to use them!

So far we have looked at how to make the most of the formal parts of your time at university - learning geography and being assessed in it. There is obviously a great deal more to life at university than formal study, and in the next chapter we look at what you can get out of the rest of your time.

6

OTHER USEFUL ACTIVITIES FOR GETTING A JOB

A geography degree is (or should be) hard work, but it certainly should not take up all your time at university. A fair balance of study, sport, paid work and leisure will be beneficial and much more fun. There should also be time outside the formal structure of your degree to broaden your horizons and perhaps bolster your chances of getting a good job. There are six ways you can do this:

- acquiring new skills;
- jobs;
- active citizenship;
- networking and contacts
- leadership and teamwork;
- using your careers service.

6.1 Acquiring new skills

Having got this far through the Guide, you will have appreciated that a geography degree can fairly claim to be teaching you a wide range of skills and that this is a clear strength of geography as a subject. It is an interdisciplinary subject and that will give you a mental flexibility denied to many other graduates. However, there are other skills which you will not be taught. Computer skills are so broad and fast moving an area - and one which is increasingly important in so many sectors - that the best advice must be to acquire as many computer skills as you can. You may learn about other software packages at home, from your parent's work-place, summer vacation courses, short courses put on by your university, or during vacation jobs. However you learn them, some familiarity with a wide range of programs and packages will be a useful addition to your *curriculum vitae* or *résumé*. You never know when one day they may come in useful.

Another set of skills relates to foreign languages. The global economy and the integration of Europe mean that foreign-language skills, even at a basic level, will be increasingly appreciated by employers. You can learn foreign languages from the university language laboratory, self-instructional packs, evening classes or when abroad. This is a useful addition to your profile, provided that you do not claim on your *curriculum vitae* or *résumé* more language skills than you actually have.

Other skills that might prove valuable would be driving, first aid, and certificates in leadership, supervisory skills or personnel management. Some of these might be developed through schemes such as (in the UK) the Duke of Edinburgh Awards or working with youth or community groups.

It is useful and fun to be able to turn your hand to many things. For fast-moving careers in the future, the key skill may well be the ability to cope quickly with new situations.

6.2 Jobs

You will probably take vacation or term-time jobs to earn money. It is worthwhile thinking about how you can use these jobs to improve your career prospects. At the simplest level you can expand on the 'previous employment' section in your *curriculum vitae* or *résumé* which, if you are only in your early 20s when you graduate, is inevitably going to be rather short. You can capitalise on a *variety* of jobs to demonstrate that you understand what different employers are looking for in their employees. Most jobs, even fairly menial ones, require punctuality, attention to detail, honesty and being a responsible employee with a good (i.e. low) absence record. You might have had some responsibility for cash-handling in this job, for dealing with the public or supervising staff even more junior than you. Analyse your jobs and see what you learned from each of them. Of course, if you have had full-time jobs before coming to university, you can include a great deal more under 'previous employment'.

Aside from traditional student jobs you could try for ones which will give you skills directly relevant to employers - working in sales, stock control, computer-based jobs, or an administrative post. These skills will immediately appeal to employers. You could try targeting jobs in the areas where you want to gain employment after you have graduated. So, if your career goal is environmental work or teaching, for example, then jobs in conservation or working with young people would establish your commitment to the area and give you an appreciation of the realities of the sector's basic activities. If you have a specific company in mind, try and get a summer job with them. Even if it is at a rather junior level you will still gain first-hand experience of the firm and they of you.

ACTIVITY 13

Note here and in your Personal Record (Appendix B) what you have learned from each vacation or other job you have taken.

Job 1 From this job I learned...

Job 2 From this job I learned...

Job 3 From this job I learned...

6.3 Active citizenship

Some employers are impressed (and so they should be) by people who, besides studying for a degree, have also given something back to society through voluntary or charity work. This can take many forms - fund-raising, being a Nightline counsellor, practical conservation work, helping at a shelter for the homeless, running a Sunday school or teaching English to non-native speakers. These are all intrinsically useful and valuable activities. Why not tell prospective employers about your voluntary work? You at least will gain a lot from it. You will get an insight into other people's lives, a sense of making a contribution to society or a good cause, and a chance to do something completely different from your university studies. You will also meet a new circle of friends and contacts.

6.4 Networking and contacts

This is probably the most intangible of the things you can do to improve your employability. It does not involve any single action common to all students. Rather, it is a suggestion that 'who you know' may be as important as 'what you know'. Nowadays there are usually formalised job-application procedures which large appointing committees can use to evaluate objectively competing job applicants, and this means that in large sectors of the economy personal contacts alone will not guarantee you a job. However, knowing people already working in your intended career area may benefit you in other ways. You may get to hear of opportunities sooner or pick up ideas on how best to present yourself so as to meet an employer's current needs. Your contacts could give you guidance on what working in the sector or for a specific employer is really like - something the career guides cannot tell you.

The tricky part is gaining the contacts. Friends and family may help. Your vacation jobs may put you in touch with people who can advise you. Your geography course may have elements of work-based learning through which you will meet useful people. Similarly you might choose your dissertation topic so that you come into contact with people in your career area. Your university's Careers Service or Department may have lists of previous graduates of your university (its 'alumni') who are available to give advice. Your university's alumni association may have a mentoring scheme which puts you in touch with former graduates or it may run career fairs on campus at which you can meet such people. You could look in specialist journals in your field and contact the authors of articles where a contact address is given. Introduce yourself and ask about work opportunities.

ACTIVITY 14

Have you started building up your own network of contacts through your Department's staff, careers service, potential employers or through your family, social contacts or work experience?

Who are these people?

*What might you **and they** gain from such contacts?*

6.5 Leadership and teamwork

It is arguable that as organisations 'de-layer' and become 'flatter', more responsibility than previously is being placed on those at the lower levels of the management pyramid. It is being given to those at ever earlier stages in their careers - that is, to people like you within five years of graduating. We explored these ideas in Sections 3.2 and 3.3. So employers are looking to recruit people who have already demonstrated some signs of leadership or leadership potential and who can work in successful teams.

So, what is 'leadership'? It includes:

- motivating a team of people to work to a plan enthusiastically;
- understanding that successful groups involve everybody, they don't just take orders;
- organising people, events, resources and timetables;
- securing resources;
- being accountable and responsible.

How might you convince a sceptical recruiter that you are a leader and a good team member? On the basis that 'actions speak louder than words', it would be useful if your *curriculum vitae* or *résumé* could record examples of you as a leader or organiser, either by yourself or with a group of other students. This might include your role in a college or student society or an organisation that is a part of your home life such as a sports club, religious organisation or social society. Whenever you claim leadership or organisational skills, you need to back this up with specific examples of what you have done. Employers also want team-players so it is just as important to have helped to run something as to have done it all yourself. Being good at teamwork is a respected skill.

KEY TIP

Help organise things which mean a lot to you.

ACTIVITY 15

What activity or event have you organised or helped to organise in the last six months (e.g. a sports event, social occasion, team project, club or society activity)?

Are there any lessons you have learned from organising such events which would help with future events you might run?

Note in your Personal Record (Appendix B) what you organised and how well it worked.

6.6 Using your careers service

Your university's careers service is an invaluable source of advice and training on careers. Here is a list of some of the things they can do for you:

- their library will tell you about types of jobs and specific employers;
- they can train you in specific job-search skills such as how to write a *curriculum vitae* or *résumé* and how to do well in interviews or aptitude tests;
- they can provide one-to-one counselling on your career choices;
- arrange careers fairs and interviews with potential employers;
- provide computer programmes that may help you decide on the kinds of jobs you wish to go for.

Many students make too little use of the many facilities which their university's careers service can offer. Certainly do not leave it until your final year at university before exploring how they can help you.

Also useful are the various books on how to go about finding a job which you can buy in any good bookshop; examples are the books by Bates and Bloch (1997), Chudley (1986), Jones (1990) and Eggert (1992).

Conclusion

At times your geography degree may seem to dominate your life at university, but it will provide only a modest part of the profile that you will present to recruiters. You need to take the rest of your life and personality just as seriously, not least because they are what make you a whole person and they will add so much fun to your time at university.

7

WHERE HAVE WE GOT TO?

In this Guide we have tried to show you:

- how you are likely to benefit from going to university (Chapter 2);
- how changes in national educational policy and the needs of employers are combining to force changes in university teaching; and the kinds of careers geographers have had recently (Chapter 3);
- how departments are going to teach you geography, why they use these methods and how you can get the most benefit from the teaching (Chapter 4);
- how departments will assess you - with some advice on how to do as well as you can under these various forms of assessment (Chapter 5);
- and the ways you can improve your employability and life skills outside the structure of your geography degree scheme (Chapter 6).

In this Chapter we shall try to summarise the Guide

How to learn geography

General

Learning geography is not about prodigious feats of memory. Think of 'facts' as being like the lights on a Christmas tree; there has to be a structure of ideas first which can support and be illuminated by the 'facts'.

There are few absolute 'facts' in geography; most geographical knowledge is debatable, provisional and liable to change or be changed.

"Reading for a degree" - two or three hours of reading are needed for each hour of lectures.

There are different styles of writing - essays, field notebooks, posters, dissertations. Make sure you use the right style for each occasion.

Have you changed the way you study since starting at university? How?

Ask when you don't understand something; you certainly won't be the only one wanting to know.

Do the courses you *enjoy*; you will probably learn and develop far better.

Do not compartmentalise your geography; think *across* modules and topics.

Keep up to date with current affairs and consider their geographical implications.

Use the Internet's facilities as much as you can, but be as sceptical of what you find on the Web as you are of your other reading.

Lectures

The most important thing to do in a lecture is *not* to take notes - it is to identify what is really important in the lecturer's words and then note these points - *active listening and summarising.*

Other ways of learning geography

Tutorials can be useful *if you prepare for them and participate*. You will get nothing from them if you don't join in.

Oral presentations can be nerve-racking; the key is to keep going, speaking clearly and not too fast. Speaking in public does get easier the more of it you do.

Fieldwork is fun and also a chance to learn new skills, learn how to work in a team and discover how to structure a field project.

Working successfully with a group of students can be tricky, but it is a skill you will need in later life.

How to be examined in geography

Examinations

Examinations test your *breadth of understanding* of a large section of geography.

Most poor examination answers are due to one of several common faults (see Section 5.3). Try to avoid these.

Practise planning examination answers.

Essays

One of the key points with essays is to understand the command word, check the explanation of essay command words in Section 5.4.

The essay references you need are missing from the library. Should you: (i) give up and go home; (ii) write the essay without any reading; (iii) browse the library shelves, catalogue and the Web for other books on the same topic?

Remember always to acknowledge the source of the material you incorporate in your essays and dissertations and so avoid the charge of plagiarism.

Make sure you get enough specific and practical feedback from your tutors on your assessed work. If you need more, ask for it.

Your dissertation

Here are eight general benefits from a successfully completed dissertation which you can include on your personal record:

- time management skills (you got it in on time);
- determination not to be beaten;
- negotiating for access to data, land, equipment or interviews;
- planning a complex piece of work;
- solving problems;
- independence (you saw it through yourself);
- new skills learned to let you do this dissertation;
- the presentational skills for a major report.

Have you planned how your dissertation could put you in touch with potential employers and establish your credentials as knowledgeable in your career area?

During your dissertation, you are in charge; make the most of the opportunity.

A dissertation is an excellent place to show how good an all-round geographer you really are. What are you planning to do that will impress the examiners favourably?

Extra-curricular activities

Keep a fair balance in your life - studies, paid work, leisure, sport, family and friends.

Collect as many basic computer skills as you can, even if some are not immediately relevant. You never know when they may come in useful.

Choose, if you can, jobs which will help you acquire career-useful skills or experiences (e.g. working with young people if your aim is teaching).

After every job, note in your Personal Record the things you learned from doing it (e.g. team work, cash handling, punctuality, dealing with the public).

Keep up any foreign language skills you have - holidays, the Internet, foreign newspapers and evening classes are all good for this.

Employers want potential leaders. What have you led or organised recently? How could you develop your organisational talents?

Organising some events for your department's geographical society might be a fun way of proving your skills as an organiser.

What career skills or experiences do you think you can reasonably hope to acquire before the end of *this* academic year? What more could you do by the end of *next* year?

Travel as widely as your budget will allow.

Planning to travel the world this summer? Great! How could your travel be made to be of deeper career benefit?

Enjoy yourself; believe in yourself.

Getting a job

List the features of the type of job you would like ideally. Re-read and amend this at the end of each year as your ideas and priorities change. Then you will know what you are aiming for and how to slant your geography degree to achieving it.

Self-assessment is a useful way of tracking your growing range of skills, qualifications and experiences. Try using Appendices A and B to monitor your progress.

About a quarter of geographers who graduate in the UK go on to further study. Should you be among them? Find out early from your careers service.

Only 8 per cent of the geographers who graduated in the UK in 1995 were still unemployed six months later.

Get someone else to read your *curriculum vitae/résumé* (you can return the favour by looking over theirs) so as to eradicate any spelling mistakes and show you how others react to your style of writing (always hard to predict).

Networking is a key skill in the workplace. It is never too soon to start networking.

Employers want more than people with specific skills who can do the job. They want reasonably congenial colleagues. Are you such a person? Can you prove it?

If you are not going to be among the 4-5% of geography graduates who get a First, how are you going to stand out as being above-averagely employable?

How might you convince an employer that you are a *flexible* potential employee?

Your chosen career area may not be obviously 'geographical'. How might you convince a recruiter that your geography degree is really relevant?

Use the full resources of your careers service; there is a lot they can do for you and not just in your final year.

And finally...

The world is getting smaller and the global economy needs geographers.

"Geography is about places; everything is somewhere; so geography is about everything." True or False?

Your learning will not stop when you leave university.

Education is what is left after you have forgotten all the facts you learned.

Need further help? Try the "Further Reading" in Section 8.

GOOD LUCK AND ENJOY GEOGRAPHY@UNIVERSITY!

8

FURTHER READING

The items marked with an asterisk (*) are perhaps the best in each section and the ones to go for if your time for further reading is limited.

Geography study skills

* Kneale, P. (1999) *Study Skills for Geography Students: a Practical Guide* (London, Arnold).

Lindsay, J. M. (1997) *Techniques in Human Geography* (London, Routledge).

How to be a student and get a degree

Barnes, R. (1995) *Successful Study for Degrees* (London, Routledge).

Marshall, P. (1995) *How to Study & Learn: your Practical Guide to Effective Study Skills* (Plymouth, How To Books).

* Northedge, A. (1995) *The Good Study Guide* (Milton Keynes, The Open University).

* Rowntree, D. (1998) *Learn how to Study: a Realistic Approach* (London, Warner Books).

Tolmie, P. (ed.) (1998) *How I Got My First Class Degree.* (Lancaster, Unit for Innovation in Higher Education, Lancaster University).

What geography is about

Allen, J. and Massey, D. (1995) *Geographical World* (Oxford, Oxford University Press).

Gould, P. (1985) *The Geographer at Work* (London, Routledge).

Haggett, P. (1990) *The Geographer's Art* (Oxford, Basil Blackwell).

Massey, D. and Allen, J (eds) (1984) *Geography Matters! a Reader* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press).

* Rogers, A., Viles, H. and Goudie, A. (1992) *The Student's Companion to Geography* (Oxford, Blackwell).

Examinations and essays

Barrass, R. (1995) *Students Must Write* (London, Routledge).

Becker, H. (1986) *Writing for Social Scientists* (Chicago, University of Chicago Press).

* Creme, P. and Lea, M. (1997) *Writing at University: a Guide for Students* (Buckingham, Open University Press).

Fitzgerald, M. (1994) Why write essays? *Journal of Geography in Higher Education*, 18(3), pp. 379-384.

Hay, I. (1995) Writing a review, *Journal of Geography in Higher Education*, 19(3), pp. 357-363.

Hay, I. (1996a) Examinations I, *Journal of Geography in Higher Education*, 20(1), pp. 137-142.

Hay, I. (1996b) Examinations II, *Journal of Geography in Higher Education*, 20(2), pp. 259-264.

Hay, I. (1997) *Communicating in Geography and Environmental Sciences* (Oxford, Oxford University Press).

Mills, C. (1994) Acknowledging sources in written assignments, *Journal of Geography in Higher Education*,18(2), pp. 263-268.

Sussams, J. E. (1998) *How to Write Effective Reports* (London, Gower).

How to produce a dissertation

Bell, J. (1993) *Doing your Research Project* (Buckingham, Open University Press).

Burkill, S. and Burley, J. (1996) Getting started on a geography dissertation, *Journal of Geography in Higher Education*, 20(3), pp. 431-438.

* Flowerdew, R. and Martin, D. (1997) *Methods in Human Geography: a Guide for Students doing a Research Project* (Harlow, Essex, Longman).

Hampson, L. (1994) *How's your Dissertation going?* (Lancaster, Unit for Innovation in Higher Education, Lancaster University).

Parsons, A, J. and Knight, P. (1995) *How to do your Dissertation in Geography and Related Disciplines* (London, Chapman & Hall).

Turabian, K. (1987) *A Manual for Writers of Term Papers, Theses and Dissertations* (Chicago, University of Chicago Press).

Other aspects of geography courses

Hay, I. (1994) Notes of guidance for prospective speakers, *Journal of Geography in Higher Education,* 18(1), pp. 57-65.

* Hay, I. (1997) *Communicating in Geography and Environmental Sciences* (Oxford, Oxford University Press).

Lee, P. and Stuart, M. (1997) Making a video, *Journal of Geography in Higher Education,* 21(1), pp. 127-134.

Lewis, S. and Mills, C. (1995) Field notebooks: a student's guide, *Journal of Geography in Higher Education*, 19(1), pp. 111-114.

Vujakovic, P. *et al.* (1994) Why work in groups? *Journal of Geography in Higher Education*, 18(1), pp. 124-127.

Vujakovic, P. (1995) Making posters, *Journal of Geography in Higher Education*, 19(2), pp. 251-256.

Young, C. (1998) Giving oral presentations, *Journal of Geography in Higher Education,* 22(2), pp. 263-268.

Applying for jobs

There are many books on this topic in high-street bookshops and there are national traditions in how to apply for jobs which need to be borne in mind. Below are a selection of titles for UK students.

Bates, T. and Bloch, S. (1997) *Employability: how to get your career on the right track* (London, Kogan Page).

Chudley, P. (1986) *How to Write Job Applications* (Creaton, Northants, Hamilton House).

Eggert, M. (1992) *The Perfect Interview* (London, Arrow Business Books).

Jones, A. (1990) *How to Write a Winning C.V.* (London, Hutchinson Business).

REFERENCES

Allen, J. and Massey, D. (1995) *Geographical World* (Oxford, Oxford University Press).

Barnes, R. (1995) *Successful Study for Degrees* (London, Routledge).

Barrass, R. (1995) *Students Must Write* (London, Routledge).

Bates, T. and Bloch, S. (1997) *Employability: how to get your career on the right track* (London, Kogan Page).

Becker, H. (1986) *Writing for Social Scientists* (Chicago, University of Chicago Press).

Bell, J. (1993) *Doing your Research Project* (Buckingham, Open University Press).

Burkill, S. and Burley, J. (1996) Getting started on a geography dissertation, *Journal of Geography in Higher Education,* 20(3), pp. 431-438.

Chudley, P. (1986) *How to Write Job Applications* (Creaton, Northants, Hamilton House).

Creme, P. and Lea, M. (1997) *Writing at University: a Guide for Students* (Buckingham, Open University Press).

Eggert, M. (1992) *The Perfect Interview* (London, Arrow Business Books).

Fitzgerald, M. (1994) Why write essays? *Journal of Geography in Higher Education,* 18(3), pp. 379-384.

Flowerdew, R. and Martin, D. (1997) *Methods in Human Geography: a Guide for Students doing a Research Project* (Harlow, Essex, Longman).

Gould, P. (1985) *The Geographer at Work* (London, Routledge).

Haggett, P. (1990) *The Geographer's Art* (Oxford, Basil Blackwell).

Hampson, L. (1994) *How's your Dissertation going?* (Lancaster, Unit for Innovation in Higher Education, Lancaster University).

Hay, I. (1994) Notes of guidance for prospective speakers, *Journal of Geography in Higher Education,* 18(1), pp. 57-65.

Hay, I. (1995) Writing a review, *Journal of Geography in Higher Education,* 19(3),

pp. 357-363.

Hay, I. (1996a) Examinations I, *Journal of Geography in Higher Education,* 20(1), pp. 137-142.

Hay, I. (1996b) Examinations II, *Journal of Geography in Higher Education,* 20(2), pp. 259-264.

Hay, I. (1997) *Communicating in Geography and Environmental Sciences* (Oxford, Oxford University Press).

Jones, A. (1990) *How to Write a Winning C.V.* (London, Hutchinson Business).

Kneale, P. (1999) *Study Skills for Geography Students: a Practical Guide* (London, Arnold).

Lee, P. and Stuart, M. (1997) Making a video, *Journal of Geography in Higher Education,* 21(1), pp. 127-134.

Lewis, S. and Mills, C. (1995) Field notebooks: a student's guide, *Journal of Geography in Higher Education*, 19(1), pp. 111-114.

Lindsey, J. M. (1997) *Techniques in Human Geography* (London, Routledge).

Marshall, P. (1995) *How to Study & Learn: your Practical Guide to Effective Study Skills* (Plymouth, How To Books).

Massey, D. and Allen, J (eds) (1984) *Geography Matters! a Reader* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press).

Mills, C. (1994) Acknowledging sources in written assignments, *Journal of Geography in Higher Education,*18(2), pp. 263-268.

Northedge, A. (1995) *The Good Study Guide* (Milton Keynes, The Open University).

Parsons, A, J. and Knight, P. (1995) *How to do your Dissertation in Geography and Related Disciplines* (London, Chapman & Hall).

Rogers, A., Viles, H. and Goudie, A. (1992) *The Student's Companion to Geography* (Oxford, Blackwell).

Rowntree, D. (1998) *Learn how to Study: a Realistic Approach* (London, Warner Books).

Sussams, J. E. (1998) *How to Write Effective Reports* (London, Gower).

Tolmie, P. (ed.) (1998) *How I Got My First Class Degree.* (Lancaster, Unit for Innovation in Higher Education, Lancaster University).

Turabian, K. (1987) *A Manual for Writers of Term Papers, Theses and Dissertations* (Chicago, University of Chicago Press).

Vujakovic, P. *et al.* (1994) Why work in groups? *Journal of Geography in Higher Education*, 18(1), pp. 124-127.

Vujakovic, P. (1995) Making posters, *Journal of Geography in Higher Education*, 19(2), pp. 251-256.

Young, C. (1998) Giving oral presentations, *Journal of Geography in Higher Education*, 22(2), pp. 263-268.

APPENDIX A

SELF-ASSESSMENT OF SKILLS

You might find it helpful to measure your progress, in terms of your growing list of skills and experiences, and so highlighting the strengths of your employment profile. We suggest that you assess where you have got to periodically throughout your geography degree.

To record your annual progress (each column of the table), either enter (as appropriate) a number or put one tick against an item (meaning 'can do that') or two ticks ('really quite good at that'). Watch your profile improve as the years of your degree course go by. Of course, at the 'start of degree' stage most students will have only a few ticks.

	Start of Degree	End of Year 1	End of Year 2	End of Final Year
For the average lecture are your lecture notes one paragraph, one page or five pages? (two pages is about the best length)				
Can you write a fairly good essay in a week?				

How many computer packages can you use - at a basic level? - reasonably? - well?				
Can you word-process an essay?				
Can you send an e-mail message with an attachment?				
How many group projects have you worked on (at school or elsewhere)?				
How many talks or oral presentations have you given ?				
Have you completed a major project or dissertation?				
How many foreign languages can you cope with - at a basic level? - reasonably? - well?				
Have you identified one or more possible career areas?				
How many events/projects/groups of people have you successfully organised in the last 12 months?				

List here the practical field or research skills which you have learned and practised.

What other skills do you have? (specify them)

APPENDIX B

YOUR PERSONAL RECORD

Reflecting on your progress is time well spent. These pages, deliberately left largely blank, are designed to encourage you to keep a Personal Record of your skills, experiences and aims as they develop during the course of your geography degree. You could photocopy these pages and add to them after each year of your degree. You might find it helpful to record your progress under the headings we suggest below, but use any other headings you find useful. As your skills broaden and your ideas change, note the details here. This record can then form the basis for compiling your *curriculum vitae* or *résumé* which will accompany your letters of application for jobs in future years.

You are likely to have three sorts of skills and competencies:

- those skills you would like to claim to have but will find it hard to prove you have

  e.g. being hard working and reliable;

- those skills you claim to have and can provide some evidence for

  e.g. good ICT skills – 'I created my own Website';

  can drive – ' have a full clean driving licence'

  good team member – 'I was part of a team of students who produced...etc.';

- those skills which are formally accredited

  e.g. doing research well – 'I got 75% for my dissertation';

  can speak French – 'I got an A grade in an examination'.

It will help convince potential employers if you can get some evidence or official accreditation or confirmation for as many of your skills and competencies as you can. Fortunately the wide range of teaching methods in geography courses should help you do this.

Your geography courses (what topics do you know about?)

Your range of communication skills: - types of writing (e.g. essays, posters, field notebooks, projects); - types of public speaking (e.g. brief tutorial talk, group presentation to class, individual presentation to class); - created Website.

Your computing and ICT skills

Your statistical and graphical skills

Your research/project/dissertation skills

Your foreign-language skills and international/travel experience

Your organizational and group-work abilities

Your contacts with the world of work (your jobs, contacts, appreciation of what it means to be a successful employee)

Your social interests

Your personal strengths

What is important to you personally in your life and future career?